

Invisible Man: An Adaptation for the Screen

Research Thesis

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by

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Visualizing the Invisible (An Invisible Manifesto)
Adapting Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* for the Screen
By Reece Thompson

Who's voice, no one's, there is no one, there is a voice without a mouth, and somewhere a kind of hearing, something compelled to hear, and somewhere a hand, it calls that a hand, it wants to make a hand, or if not a hand something somewhere that can leave a trace, of what is made, of what is said, you can't do with less, no, that's romancing, more romancing, there is nothing but a voice murmuring a trace (337).

Samuel Beckett, Texts for Nothing

My objective in adaptation is, essentially, to visualize Ellison's novel – that is to cinematize the visuals induced by Ellison and externalize his complex Narrator who is “bent upon finding his way in areas of society whose manners, motives, and rituals [are] baffling” (Ellison, viii). At times, Ellison's visions are lucid on the page and easily translatable, as in the Battle Royale sequence, at other times enigmatic and require greater deviation, as in the accident at Liberty Paints. Adapting Ellison's story requires an apt organization of elements, not to unify the novel and cinematic mediums but to place on the screen a parallel world in which all of the elements push collectively forward into esemplasticity. In order for me to fulfill my objective successfully, it is important that I understand Ellison's motives and influences. First, I must address a more basic question – a question to which I feel it is not my obligation to provide answers (nor is it Ellison's) but rather to suggest angles of approach. What is *Invisible Man* about? Perhaps an easier way begin this excavation is to ask what it is not about, and this brings me to my first point.

Invisible Man is not about race. To the critical thinker, this may be readily apparent; however, I feel it is my duty to reiterate the importance of generating more widely conversable

ideas about art and humanity rather than the constrained battle of black versus white. I heard poet Martha Collins discuss her collections, *Blue Front* and *White Papers*, during which she made an important distinction between writing about race and writing from racial experience. Is Ellison writing from racial experience? Yes – that is apparent. But to suggest that this is a story about race is to deflate the novel of oxygen. As Ellison hypothesizes, “...war could, with art, be transformed into something deeper and more meaningful than its surface violence.” In other words, there is more than what meets the eye.

Invisible Man should be referred to as an absurdist text, as the Narrator tries to climb a ladder in a rungless world. Ellison gives us just enough information at times to make us project our own visions and expectations into the world of his creation, but ultimately, he provides little to ground the story into our reality. It exists on a parallel plane operating on illogical principles. We see this exemplified in the Liberty Paints. Creating an “optic white” color by mixing in black dope is, by all accounts of our reality, absurd. But these are precisely the rules that govern the world in which the Narrator resides. Therefore, we do not want to see the New York City with which we are familiar. We do not want to be able to find the apartment in which the Narrator lives. We do not want to be moving in the same directions. The world of this city should be an unmapable maze. There is a tense and often illogical relationship between our world and the Narrator’s. It is important that the film is free of these confines – even that of time. Thus, it must be asked: How does time move in an absurdist’s world? Does it feel stagnant? Cyclical? In Ellison’s case, time appears to leap forward and backward spontaneously and somewhat untraceably (an idea to which we will return). It is also important, not only for the novel but for practical reasons, to establish a timelessness. Ellison presents a number of clues that point to the 1930’s and 40’s, but the thematic quality of the story transcends this time period. So, how does

that affect the screen? These confines seem to me to be a hindrance in the capacity of the story. This is not, after all, a period piece. Certainly, there are inescapable objects such as automobiles, radios, and telephones that suggest a particular time period, but as readers, or encroachers on this alternate world, we must constantly remind ourselves that this is not our history. This is a parallel present derived from a parallel past. As Ellison states, this story should be “self-generating” (xxiii). Thus we arrive at historicity.

The Narrator is an activist from a non-existent history. He creates (in retrospect - an issue of later discussion) his own history. Of course, there was no Ras the Exhorter or Brotherhood on the streets of New York during the 1930's, but we see the parallels. The doings of Ras are often connected to the extremist advocacies of Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican nationalist detested by many for his violent opinions. He, like Ras, would often produce orations on New York City street corners. The reality is, however, that Ras the Exhorter is *not* Marcus Garvey. Is his character influenced by activists and orators such as Garvey? Surely. But that difference is important to Ellison's novel and to the film respectively. The aim in this adaptation is not to align historical events but to build a history as Ellison has done. The allegorical significance will remain regardless. Ellison reveals in his introduction to *Invisible Man*, the understanding that his Narrator is “without question a ‘character.’” This statement is a spade in the digging for aboutness. Ellison is fully aware of his craft, hyperconscious even. He is not attempting to simulate reality. He is consciously creating a new world, a world constantly in flux and one that continually reveals new principles. Thus, it is important to ensure every piece of aggregate in the film's foundation is a stone itself and not necessarily reliant upon the stone preceding. In other words, the film should, like the novel, describe not the world we live in but explore in depth the one it creates. One example of this is the confusion of city streets. While many viewers might

recognize and be familiar with the location of Harlem, we are not revealing exact coordinates. We do not want to see the cross streets of the New York City grid. It is imperative to achieve directional and, perhaps even at times, locational confusion. This gives the illusion of a larger existing world. Note that this notion should not necessarily be translated into the directorial or editorial concept of conflict of direction – while it can be useful for moments of tension, it is not my intention to bring directional confusion, in this instance, into filmic self-consciousness. One reason for the directional confusion in the world of the film is due to the nature of Ellison’s narrative setup and the question of temporality.

We do not know how long the Narrator has been in “hibernation” – although we expect it has been years. We do not know how many times he has told this story. We do not know to whom he is telling the current story. We assume that he is recalling these events from his own past, but we do not know their accuracy. The Narrator is an orator after all. His specialty is manipulation through speech. Thus, by eliminating voiceover, we eliminate the direct manipulation of the Narrator. This is good for the film. The story requires that extra notch of omniscience. Billy Wilder was an avid proponent for voiceover, arguing that it spares the viewer wasted footage on back-story. I say it would drown the narrative in irrelevant questions (although the idea of having a disembodied voice tell the story is tempting – but that issue has been resolved through other methods). Finally, if the story is told through voiceover, we occupy the Narrator’s underground. And that would be injustice.

Regarding temporality, Kierkegaard wrote in *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, “Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward.” And without either of these, “all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise”

(149). The correspondence of this notion with *Invisible Man* lies within the interior motives of the Narrator. In the novel, we immediately understand that there are two narrative timelines – the narrative present, which consists of our Narrator hoarding power from “Monopolated Light & Power,” and the narrative as told by the Narrator in the narrative present, which transports us back to the narrative past. Often in literature and philosophy, the question of identity is directly associated with that of story. If one has a story, one has an identity. In the case of our Narrator, his story consists of not having an identity (another reason for omitting voiceover - to further erase the trace of the Narrator’s possession of this story). Now, we must ask to what degree the Narrator is recollecting and to what degree he is repeating. Even within the larger construction of his story, he recollects *and* repeats. In fact, he repeats the memory of his grandfather (both directly and indirectly) on multiple occasions. In fact, it is arguable that the Narrator only seems to recollect the scene of his grandfather’s dying words. The rest of his story is actually a repetition – that is, it moves forward toward a kind of change, taking experience into account. Whether or not change is actually achieved is debatable. The novel seems to suggest the Narrator is prepared to reenter the world with a new and heightened perspective. In fact, when he says in the prologue, “A hibernation is a covert preparation for a more overt action,” we are to expect a reemergence of action in the Narrator’s future (assuming the end of the novel marks the end of hibernation). In the screenplay, I wanted to obscure this promise of change. It fits the absurdity of the story more appropriately for the Narrator to exist, as it seems to me, as a cog in the ever-turning gear of his machine. Temporality is also questioned by the uncertain changes in season and the uncertain amount of time spent in the Brotherhood. While the montage of the Narrator gathering notoriety throughout the Harlem district depicts a significant amount of time, it is deliberately indeterminate. This idea originates in the prologue when the Narrator explains,

“Invisibility gives one a slightly different sense of time, you’re never quite on beat” (8). This brings up another of Ellison’s influences: Jazz.

This story must be self-generating. Even though the Narrator is presumably returning to the past, it must constantly feel as though it is unfolding in the present (yet another reason for eliminating voiceover). Improvisation is perhaps the single most important and identifiable word associated with jazz in the early twentieth century. Jazz was known as being spontaneous and liberating. It did not always follow the rules. Yet, like the blues, it carried an impeccable sense of rhythm and raw emotion. “Being uncertain of my skill I would have to improvise upon my materials in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild star-burst of metamorphosis” writes Ellison. “I was free to enjoy the surprises of incident and character as they popped into view” (xxiii). We see this not only in the technical shifts in the novel (there is dramatic shift in tone and character after the Liberty Paints accident) but also in the actions of the Narrator. His first speech after the brutal Battle Royale is scripted and ineffective. Similarly is his first speech for the Brotherhood. The Narrator succeeds when he speaks spontaneously. Examples include the Dispossession speech and Clifton’s funeral where he discards the script. There is more honest emotion summoned from spontaneous speech in the case of the Narrator. And it is this spontaneity that disrupts the scientific approach of the Brotherhood. As he tells Brother Jack with truthful simplicity and certainly unscientific reasoning after the Dispossession speech, “I was angry.” Of course, considering this, it is with unfailing irony that I attempt to script a film.

Throughout the story, we are also conscious of music and musicality. Ellison begins the novel with a direct reference to Louis Armstrong. This has been incorporated into the Narrator’s arrival at the Chthonian, which is, itself, a rhythmic scene but with uncomfortable overtones of

scriptedness. In addition, there is an inherent jazzy and bluesy quality in characters such as Wheatstraw, who was inspired by the early blues musician, Peetie Wheatstraw. Although it was ultimately cut, I had originally included a scene with a busker in the subway singing a sort of lingering blues tune. This is, without question, a technique worth further exploration, especially considering the emergence of jazz radio on the “low frequencies” – an idea clearly of interest to Ellison. The notion of spontaneity is also important in discussing the submersion into a greater non-reality as the film progresses. By act three, when the streets turn to water, as a viewer, one should expect a new riff at any moment.

In the following sections, it is not my intention to point out every detail, nor is it necessarily to defend my choices. I believe it is important, however, to explain my thoughts and ideas during composition and post-composition.

On the concept of vision, which is arguably the most arduously handled topic of exploration, I began to think a lot about Samuel Beckett, a contemporary of Ellison’s who wrote extensively on the eye. Not only the eye as an organ of perception and recognition (thus verifying existence) but of the ‘I’ that serves as the ever-elusive source of consciousness and thought. Although Beckett and Ellison come from different backgrounds and might appear a strange pair, take for example a passage from Ellison’s prologue: “That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality” (Ellison, 3). Now compare it to a passage in Beckett’s novel, *Murphy*: “The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy” (Beckett, 150). The ‘I,’ of course, is not only serving as placeholders for the flesh and blood of the narrators, but it is also representing the source of

consciousness, perception, and the source from which the words on the page are composed – the mysterious God-like force that feeds thought. This is a highly self-conscious mode of writing from both Ellison and Beckett. Early in the eighteenth century, Bishop Berkeley made popular the phrase “esse est percipi,” which translates to “to be is to be perceived.” This philosophy fuels the majority of Beckett’s work, but I also find it useful for discussing Ellison’s novel. In the third act, under the disguise of Rinehart, the Narrator becomes unperceivable, invisible, and according to Beckettian philosophy non-existent. This brings me to the significance of the scene underground where the Narrator emerges, and Brother Jack gouges his eyes out. The power in this scene resides in the words of Bishop Berkeley. Because Jack relies on the Narrator’s recognition to exist, the gouging of his eyes negates them both. By removing the organ that perceives Jack, Jack can no longer be recognized. Thus, he no longer exists. In the same way that Beckett’s works (ex. *Texts for Nothing*) operate on this principle of infinite regress and negation by always trying to obtain the source of the ‘I,’ we can see the steady decline in the Narrator’s journey until he buries himself underground. Here he, quite literally, occupies a sort of negative space. The idea of consciousness and perception of the Other reminds us of another crucial text, and one almost certainly closer to Ellison’s grasp than Beckett: W.E.B. DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he writes of the “double-consciousness:”

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (DuBois, 12).

In his essay, “The Signifying Modernist: Ralph Ellison and the Limits of the Double Consciousness,” William Lyne argues that Bledsoe, Trueblood, Brockway, and Rinehart all display various degrees of “double-voiced craftiness” or “twoness,” as DuBois calls it. Lyne continues to say, “His [Ellison’s] insistence on the variety and autonomy of African American life and his trafficking in the motifs and artistic techniques of the Euro-American literary tradition have attracted continual and vociferous criticism from the radical Left.” Lyne then cites Abner N. Berry’s article that bashes *Invisible Man* for being “439 pages of contempt for humanity, written in an affected, pretentious, and other worldly style to suit the king pins of world white supremacy” (Lyne, 320). Because these critics seem to be blindfolded by the notions of race and racial identity, they are neglecting the fact that all of Ellison’s characters display twoness – this includes Brother Jack, Norton, Clifton, and perhaps even more so the Narrator himself. If anyone’s words are to be taken wholeheartedly, they are Ellison’s:

I would have to provide [the Narrator] with something of a worldview, give him a consciousness in which serious philosophical questions could be raised, provide him with a range of diction that could play upon the richness of our readily shared vernacular speech and construct a plot that would bring him in contact with a variety of American types as they operated on various levels of society. Most of all, I would have to approach racial stereotypes as a given fact of the social process and proceed, while gambling with the reader’s capacity for fictional truth, to reveal the human complexity which stereotypes are intended to conceal (Ellison, xxii).

So what does this mean for me as a screenwriter? One technique I try to employ as often as possible, in order to emphasize internal conflict, is the description of light and dark as an alternative to white and black. Although sometimes it is necessary, economically, to use white or

black to describe a physical property, light and dark is often more useful. It not only provides a more cinematic visual and tone but it subtly directs the scene as well – giving texture along with color. One example of this is the use of a chessboard (the rug in the Battle Royale sequence, the tiles of the Men’s House in Harlem, and the king on Brockway’s desk), which represents a kind of game in which the Narrator is trapped. Although we differentiate sides of chess with the terms “black” and “white,” they do not necessarily reflect those colors. A more accurate description would be “dark” and “light.” Similarly, the recurrence of marble (statues, busts, columns and pedestals) becomes an interesting motif. Not only is the swirling of light and dark an interesting concept in relation to the story but also is the fact that we see it in areas of danger for the Narrator. In addition, the lavishness of the marble depicts the high-class status to which the Narrator aspires. Due to the immense amount of light and dark imagery throughout, the final cut to gray might seem to be an obvious choice. My reasoning, however, stems from the photographic significance of middle gray. Capturing “true” colors is not based on a white or a black but rather middle gray – eighteen percent gray to be exact. It is from this origin which all color stems in the lens of a camera. I think that is far more interesting to consider than simply unifying of black and white.

Ellison writes in his introduction, the Narrator is “young, powerless (reflecting the difficulties of Negro leaders of the period) and ambitious for a role of leadership, a role at which he [is] doomed to fail” (Ellison, xix). Because of this, I assigned the Narrator a tendency to imitate the actions of those in authoritative positions. He looks up to those in positions of authority, most notably, Bledsoe. Bledsoe is always adjusting his tie in the mirror and checking his pocket watch (an action repeated later by Emerson Jr. and Brockway). The final imitation, of

course, is a full-body transformation into Rinehart, but I wanted to instill this notion early in the film.

One technique that the novel gets away with is the conscious withholding of information. This is a particularly difficult issue to address in a film. With a limited amount of screen time, the screenwriter cannot afford to introduce an important character like Clifton as late as Ellison does, nor can he necessarily set up expectations and deliver otherwise. In the novel, we are aware that the Narrator is telling this story in the narrative present. He already knows the details and where they lead. As readers, we are subject to his construction. Film, which operates within greater time constraints as well as an extra layer of narrative manipulation (editing), necessitates a less involved narrator. For reasons already addressed, it was my duty to minimize the Narrator's control of the story. As a result, certain plot points, such as the earlier introduction to Clifton are required.

One aspect of the script, as it reads currently, which feels regrettably unexplored (although it would be more thoroughly addressed by a director) is the notion of the setting, and to some extent the body, as a machine. There is what I feel to be an important scene description as the Narrator walks into Brockway's lair, which describes it as "the heart of a giant machine." It is my hope that this, at the very least, plants a seed in the reader's mind. For in every machine, there are cogs that allow the machine to function, but often, they are unrecognized and neglected. This simulated world is, in a way, a type of matrix – calculated yet always spontaneous in its expansive creation, thus the operations of a machine to externalize emotion could be a highly effective correlative.

Finally, I believe it is important to discuss the relevance of this film in our world today. Ultimately, if the story does not speak to this generation, no one will care, and the film will not

be produced. In my opinion, this particular story could not be timelier. In 2012, it seems to me that we are journeying into a new artistic era and one that may not be fully realized until we depart yet again. The question is: How will this generation's art be characterized? What will our books and music look and sound like? How will our entertainment evolve, and more importantly, how will this art communicate? Regarding film, if we look back to the last five Academy Award best picture winners (not that these films necessarily represent the pinnacle of art) they depict societal themes such as the shifting generations (*No Country for Old Men*), war (*The Hurt Locker*), politics (*The King's Speech*), and the momentous change in entertainment (*The Artist*). All of these are contemporary topics of discussion and debate. More importantly, *Invisible Man* seems to encompass all of these issues. Not only are we rapidly progressing into the digital age, which changes the operations of war, politics, and entertainment, we are communicating through different mediums. Even violence is becoming digital. People are recreating versions of themselves on Facebook. Identities are more layered than ever. As quickly as one is trampled by the digital rush, another individual emerges through the worldwide recognition of YouTube. While communication is becoming faster and easier (the speed at which one can voice an opinion is staggering), can we really say how we are, collectively, addressing social and political issues such as gay marriage and racial equality? It seems as though the digital age is inherently working to obscure these issues, for we still discuss them in the same terms, and the progress is uncertain. It is difficult to say where we stand, globally, on gay marriage, for example. It seems as though we are slowly becoming more liberal as the younger generation populates, but what will it mean if it is legalized? Arguably more difficult to address is where people stand on the backgrounds and beliefs of others, not only racial but religious and political as well. Is this the beginning of toleration (an issue which is asymptotic by nature)? The massive amount of vocal

input on these issues seems only to confuse them. In a way, Ellison's Narrator comes to epitomize the victim of these opinions. John Stuart Mill wrote in *On Liberty*, "The greatest harm done is to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped, and their reason cowed, by the fear of heresy" (Mill, 40). Historically, the most devastating violence and persecution occurs not from the butting heads of opinion but the refusal to recognize the numerous tunnels of reality. All of this amounts to the question of change, this enigma embedded in the back of everyone's mind, the buzzword for hope of which our president speaks, and the question of repetition – to what degree are we recollecting forward in this strange post-post-modern age?

Note regarding the film's length: This is an epic novel. It requires an epic screenplay. If this world is compressed into a BB, it might still level a neighborhood, but it will all be over much too quickly. It needs to be powerful, and that power must be felt at length.

The perception of distance by the eye, which seems so like intuition, is thus, in reality, an inference grounded on experience; an inference, too, which we learn to make; and which we make with more and more correctness as our experience increases; though in familiar cases it takes place, so rapidly as to appear exactly on a par with those perceptions of sight which are really intuitive, our perceptions of colour.

John Stuart Mill, A System of Logic

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Invisible Man

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Based on the Novel by Ralph Ellison

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FADE IN:

INT. UNDERGROUND HOLE - DAY

All is silent. White light.

Buzz of electrical wires grows louder. Halogen bulbs burn brightly. Some flicker.

Clicking of a typewriter emerges through the buzzing. Light washes out a lone FIGURE sitting in a chair. Typewriter sounds overtake the buzzing. A low rumble escalates. The room begins to tremble. Typing ceases.

Buzzing emerges louder than ever. The bulbs grow brighter. The thunder of a fuse blowing ends in complete darkness.

Breathing. The whites of eyes.

INVISIBLE MAN

Ras?

(beat)

Brother Jack?

Silence.

Clicking of a few more keys. Rips pages out.

EXT. LUXURY HOTEL - NIGHT

YEARS EARLIER

A younger INVISIBLE MAN walks erectly, dressed in his finest suit. He is clean-shaven and athletic.

He carries a typewritten speech in his hand.

A BELLHOP opens the hotel door for him.

IM

Thank you.

LOBBY

IM walks stifly into the hotel, grasping his speech and following the noise of the crowd. He looks up at the tall, elaborate marble columns and ornate Rococo paintings.

He is a shadow on the huge walls.

He peeks through the lighted crack in a doorway.

A MAN dressed in a white suit and hat grabs his arm and pulls him into a side door.

WHITE MAN

Would you hurry up, boy. It's about to start.

BACKSTAGE

The Man yanks IM up a flight of steps into a small, smoky, crowded room full of other YOUNG BLACK BOYS. Some are dressed in slacks. Some wear undershirts, others tieless dress shirts.

They all finish tying their boxing gloves.

Red gloves are shoved into IM's chest.

The sound of a clarinet and a raucous CROWD slips through the ballroom side door.

SUPERINTENDENT (O.S.)

(into mic)

Bring up the shines, gentlemen.
Bring up the little shines.

The Boys are herded through the door and onto the stage.

BALLROOM

The Crowd consists of wealthy white MEN. Some stand and shout. Others sit, smoke cigars, and drink whisky.

A boxing ring is in the center of the room, nearly veiled by the Crowd.

The lights dim.

The Men cheer and shout.

The Boys are lined up on stage in boxing attire. A NAKED BLONDE WOMAN struts across the stage.

IM stares at her breasts. The sound of the crowd fades. His eyes move down to her pelvis. He notices an American flag tattoo.

The volume of the room resurfaces.

CROWD VOICES

You better not look, you niggers!

The Naked Woman dances sensually.

Smoke permeates through the ballroom.

The Boys are scared stiff. One faints. Another begins to cry. One covers his crotch with his boxing gloves.

The music quickens.

A LARGE MAN in the front row grabs the Woman's leg. He pulls her down and off stage into the swarm of Men.

The Crowd hollers. The Woman darts toward the door. The Men chase her.

IM watches the Men's feral eyes and spitting mouths.

They catch the Woman. She shouts and swats. Some Men push and shove the others. The Woman slides out the door.

Confused, the Boys rustle about on stage and jump off. Some head backstage.

SUPERINTENDENT

No! Into the ring. Where do you
think you're going?

The Superintendent shuffles the Boys back into the room.

The Boys freeze, then reluctantly move toward the boxing ring.

BALLROOM BOXING RING

Boys climb through the ropes. Some are shoved.

IM slides under the ropes. He watches the Crowd intently. He is slapped with a band of white cloth across his eyes. His hands are bound in gloves.

BLEARY VOICES yell intently.

BLEARY VOICES (O.S.)

Get in there -- Let me at that big
nigger -- Help me hold Jack! -- Let
me at those black sonsabitches! --
Battle Royale!

A bell clangs.

The Crowd quiets. The sound of moving feet takes over.

IM gets jolted in the head by a flying glove. He swings at the air. More gloves strike his abdomen. IM stumbles about.

The smokes grows thicker.

Another glove strikes IM's face, sending blood airborne. IM falls and struggles to stand. He grabs for the ropes He is pounded with gloves and feet.

BLEARY VOICES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Get up, black boy!

The white blindfold slides down IM's face enough to reveal a bruised eye. He sees the ring of blind Boys. He moves and throws punches amid the blood, sweat, and smoke.

CROWD
Slug him! Knock his guts out!
Uppercut, uppercut!

IM watches the Boys fall, struggle, and take blows to their heads.

The Crowd is more threatening. The sound of fighting Boys recedes.

IM stands and faces the emptiness. He can still see in his periphery.

There is only one Boy left - the huge TATLOCK.

IM bolts toward him and punches his nose. Tatlock responds with a powerful blow to the stomach. They clinch.

IM
Fake it.
TATLOCK
What?
IM
Fake it. I'll give you the prize.
TATLOCK
For them?

They struggle.

IM
Five dollars more.
TATLOCK
Fuck you.

Tatlock pounds him in the ribs. The Crowd roars.

The OFFICIAL reaches five.

The Official reaches ten.

A bell rings.

Blood drips from IM's swollen face. He is dragged to a chair and placed upright. He breathes irregularly.

A rug is tossed across the floor of the ring. It has alternating dark and light squares like a chess board.

A few OFFICIALS sprinkle coins on top.

SUPERINTENDENT

Alright boys. Come on up and collect your winnings.

IM eyes the gold coins on the rug among the silver pieces.

CROWD

That's right! Get down there! It's all yours!

Men laugh. The Boys are pushed to their knees.

SUPERINTENDENT

Ready. Go!

The Boys crawl violently onto the rug.

IM lunges toward the gold pieces. The Boys twist and jolt with the shock from the electric rug. They grunt and howl.

IM convulses atop the rug, unable to remove his hand.

The rug buzzes with energy.

CROWD

Pick it up goddammit! Pick it up!

IM's eyes grow large. He begins to smile. He snatches a few gold coins. He laughs. His body jolts. He laughs hysterically, enjoying the rushing current. He swipes a few coins off the rug.

Another Boy falls onto his back and convulses. Others grab one coin at a time. Some stand back and watch.

The standing Boys get shoved to their knees and kicked onto the rug. Some laugh, some cry. The Crowd cries with laughter. Everyone sweats.

SUPERINTENDENT

Okay. Okay!

The Superintendent bangs on the podium. The Crowd quiets.

SUPERINTENDENT (CONT'D)

All right, boys. That's all.

The Boys shuffle out of the ring and past the stage. The Superintendent hands a white envelope to Tatlock.

INT. BALLROOM STAGE - NIGHT

The lights brighten in the ballroom.

IM waits by the Superintendent's side.

SUPERINTENDENT

Gentlemen. We now enter a most serious portion of the program.

Spotlight on the Superintendent. He smiles at IM, who stands stiff with dried blood and bruises.

SUPERINTENDENT (CONT'D)

This young man to my right has a graduation speech to deliver. So if you will please give him your attention.

The Superintendent leaves the podium.

IM walks carefully to the microphone. The Crowd's chatter diminishes with a few stray laughs.

The microphone squeals at his approaching lips. The room is dead silent. IM breathes cautiously.

He removes a crumpled speech from his pocket and unfolds it. His hands twitch and tremor. He looks up at the darkened room. His eye is swollen, lip still bleeding.

INT. COLD BEDROOM - DAY

FLASHBACK

A preadolescent IM stands with his MOTHER and FATHER around the bed of his GRANDFATHER.

A choral version of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" plays lightly from an old stereo.

Grandfather coughs with soggy eyes. Grandfather motions to IM's Father. IM lets go of his Father's hand.

Grandfather's breath wisps through his mouth. IM's Father kneels down at his bedside.

GRANDFATHER

Life is war. You have to be a traitor.

IM watches his Grandfather's lips.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)
Overcome them with yesses. You hear
me?

IM watches his Grandfather's eyes dart to his own.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)
Live with your head in the lion's
mouth. Let them swallow you until
they vomit. Learn it to the young
ones.

IM holds eye contact with his Grandfather until Grandfather
looks away and closes his eyes.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)
Yes them. Yes. Yes. Yes.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BALLROOM STAGE - NIGHT

IM stares into the dark Crowd. His voice shrieks and crackles.

IM
A ship lost at sea--

CROWD
Louder.

IM
A ship--

CROWD
Louder!

IM
A ship lost at sea for many days
suddenly sighted a friendly vessel.

IM relaxes his shoulders and stands taller.

IM (CONT'D)
From the mast of the unfortunate
vessel was seen a signal. "Water,
water, we die of thirst." The answer
from the friendly vessel came back.
"Cast down your buckets where you
are." The captain of the distressed
vessel, at last heeding the
injunction, cast down his bucket,
and it came up full of fresh sparkling
water from the mouth of the Amazon
River.

The crowd chatters lightly.

IM (CONT'D)
These words that I--

He coughs. Most of the Crowd pays no attention. He swallows a dry-throated, fluid-filled swallow.

IM (CONT'D)
These words that I speak are the words extolled by our wise leader and educator.

IM takes a deep breath among the growing chatter. He continues reading.

IM (CONT'D)
And like him, I say to my fellow Americans, who fear the foreign land. Who seek to improve their conditions. To those who underestimate the necessity of cultivating friendly relations to his neighbors. I say to you. Cast down your bucket where you are. Establish relations. Friendly relations with all men.

IM looks up from his paper.

IM (CONT'D)
Cast it down.

Men in the crowd shake their heads, shrug, and comment.

IM (CONT'D)
Consider it your social responsibility to--

The Crowd roars. A Man stands up. IM freezes.

MAN
What'd you say, boy?

IM
Social--

MAN
Louder.

IM
Social--

MAN
More!

IM
Respon--

MAN

Again!

IM

--Sibility.

The Crowd roars in laughter. IM sinks behind the microphone.

MAN

Social what now?

IM

Equality.

The Crowd is silent.

The lights in the back of the ballroom turn off with the burst of a generator, leaving IM in a single, dim spotlight.

WHITEY

You best speak slowly, boy.

IM

Consider it your social responsibility to learn about your neighbors, whoever they may be. Cast it down. Seek to understand all races of men who walk upon this earth. Cast it down.

He steps away from the microphone. He looks toward the Superintendent. A few stray claps echo through the room. The Superintendent approaches holding a white package.

SUPERINTENDENT

He makes a good speech. Perhaps one day he will lead his people down the proper path. In the name of the Board of Education, take this prize and use it well, young man.

He hands IM the shining package. IM holds it, wide-eyed. Drool from his bloody lip drips onto the package. He wipes it away. He opens the package and pulls out a leather-bound document. IM's eyes catch "Scholarship" and "College" printed on the document. He scans it in disbelief.

A trail of blood slips off the envelope.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE HALLWAY - DAY

THREE YEARS LATER

IM sits in an elaborate office suite with shiny tile floors and small marble sculptures and vases atop pedestals. He wears a navy suit and tie.

The nameplate outside the closed door reads, "Dr. Bledsoe, President."

IM reads a book of Cicero's political speeches - *Pro Archia Poeta*.

BLEDSON walks down the hall with a briefcase. He is tall, fit, and clean-cut.

BLEDSON
You're early.

IM
Yes, sir.

He closes his book and stands tall.

BLEDSON
Come in.

IM follows Bledson through the door.

INT. OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

The office is adorned with leather seating. A RECEPTIONIST tilts her head and smiles from her island desk.

BLEDSON
Good afternoon, Stacy.

STACY
Good afternoon, Dr. Bledson.

BLEDSON
Any word from Mr. Norton?

STACY
He should be arriving on time.

BLEDSON
Good.

Bledson and IM move into Bledson's office.

INT. BLEDSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Leather chairs are oriented around an organized desk with a brass lamp and nameplate.

Bledson hangs his jacket upon the wooden tree in the corner. He stands in front of the mirror, adjusts his tie, and fingers his cuffs. He moves to his desk, sits, and pulls a golden pen from his breast pocket.

He flips through a schedule on his desk.

BLEDSON

Have a seat.

IM sits upright.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

You understand the significance of
Founder's day, I presume.

IM

Yes, sir.

Bledson scribbles some notes.

BLEDSON

Mr. Norton is scheduled to arrive at
two-thirty, at which time he will be
escorted into the welcoming reception.
Between the reception and the
administrative dinner, that is from
four to six, he has requested an
escort to drive him around campus.
That's where you come in.

IM

Yes, sir.

BLEDSON

You've been here for three years as
an administrative assistant, so I
assume I can trust you, yes?

Bledson scans his pages, taking notes.

IM

Absolutely, sir.

BLEDSON

Being an older trustee, Mr. Norton
tires quickly, so he will simply be
looking for a leisurely ride. Nothing
out of the ordinary. We don't want
him to be exhausted for dinner.

IM

I understand. Is there anything in
particular Mr. Norton would like to
see?

BLEDSON

I don't believe so. Just stay within
the university walls, okay? And
don't bore him with the usual campus
tour talk. He's a co-founder for
God's sake.

IM

Yes sir.

IM sits on the edge of his chair.

BLEDSON

Good. That's all.

IM stands and heads toward the door.

IM

Thank you, sir.

BLEDSON

Four o' clock. Don't be late.

IM

I'll be there at a quarter 'til.

IM exits with energy in his step.

INT. OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

IM walks briskly past Stacy.

IM

Have a good afternoon, Stacy.

EXT. GREEN CAMPUS - DAY

IM smiles, nearly skipping beneath the green foliage of campus. The trees wave in the light breeze.

He stands before the marble statue of a founder. The statue depicts a man kneeling in honor. IM smiles and runs his hand along the smooth base.

He marches to a small, shady grove. He sits on a bench and reads.

EXT. ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING - DAY

A black car pulls up to the front of the elaborate, gothic, ivy-laden building. Dust from the gravel drifts into the air.

IM leaves the car running and gets out. He removes his hat and waits by the car. The front doors open.

Mr. NORTON, a feeble but sophisticated old man walks with his cane down the stairs.

Bledsoe and another FACULTY MEMBER escort him.

IM smiles proudly at Bledsoe. Bledsoe smiles at Mr. Norton and glances at IM with an iron stare.

Norton approaches the car.

NORTON
Good afternoon, young man.

IM
Good afternoon, sir. Please have a seat and make yourself comfortable.

IM gets in the drivers seat and salutes to Bledsoe.

Bledsoe slips his hands in his pockets. The car pulls away.

INT. CAR - DAY

IM sits up tall and glances in the mirror occasionally.

Norton lights a cigar. Smoke fills the car.

IM
Where shall I drive you, sir?

NORTON
Perhaps you could just drive.
Anywhere you'd like.

IM
Yes, sir. Might I show you the campus?

NORTON
I know this campus better than my own home. Perhaps we could get out in the air a bit.

IM hesitates.

IM
Yes, sir.

IM turns onto a side road. The green campus disappears in the rear-view.

NORTON
You are a mighty lucky young man to be receiving an education at this university.

IM
Yes, sir. I am very fortunate.

IM watches the white dividing line intently.

NORTON

I am lucky myself, I suppose. That your founder had the will of ram. And that he believed in me. I was here years ago. Long before you. Long before your parents even. Before the trees and flowers. This was all just a wasteland.

IM

It's quite an achievement.

NORTON

It's not mine. Well part of it is, I suppose. It's been so long, I can't quite remember.

IM

Why did you become involved in the school, sir, if you don't mind me asking?

NORTON

I think I knew that your people were somehow connected to my destiny. Do you understand?

IM glances in the mirror.

NORTON (CONT'D)

You have studied Emerson, I presume?

IM

I'm afraid I haven't yet, sir.

NORTON

Well Emerson was a New Englander like me, and he had a hand in your destiny. Yes, that's what I mean. You are my fate.

IM

I'm not sure I understand, sir.

NORTON

Upon you depends the outcome of the years I spent developing your school. I have been a first-hand organizer of human life, you might say. And only you can tell me to what degree I have succeeded.

IM

I think I understand now.

NORTON

I suppose there is another reason.

Norton reaches into his wallet and tenderly removes a photograph.

NORTON (CONT'D)

She was too pure for life. Too pure,
too good, and too beautiful.

He hands the photograph to IM.

IM studies the young, fair-skinned GIRL. He hands to photo back.

IM

Yes, sir. She is beautiful.

NORTON

She was. She was rare and perfect.
I found it difficult to believe she
was my own.

Norton fumbles in his pocket.

NORTON (CONT'D)

She collapsed in Munich, and the
best medical science in the world
couldn't save her.

IM

I'm very sorry, sir.

NORTON

Maybe it is her to whom you owe your
fate. Will you promise to tell us
our fate?

IM glances in the mirror.

IM

Yes. I mean yes, sir. I'll try.

EXT. CAR - DAY

The whitewall of the tire spins. The wheel whisks up dust
from the road.

Norton studies the landscape through the window.

NORTON

Is that a log cabin?

INT. CAR - DAY

IM peeks out the window.

IM
Yes, sir. It belongs to Jim Truebl--

He swallows hard in discomfort.

NORTON
It belongs to whom?

IM grinds his teeth.

IM
Jim Trueblood, sir.

NORTON
I don't recall that name. Are they
affiliated with the University?

IM
No, sir. In fact, they are rather
disliked by us. I mean the University
community. There have been stories.

NORTON
I was unaware that any of these old
cabins still remained.

EXT. TRUEBLOOD CABIN - DAY

Two BLACK FIGURES stand outside the cabin, both wearing
overalls. One carries a small CHILD.

INT. CAR - DAY

Norton puffs his cigar.

NORTON
Pull over.

IM
Sir, I'm not sure--

NORTON
Pull over.

EXT. CAR - DAY

IM pulls over the white dividing line and parks in the front of the cabin.

EXT. TRUEBLOOD CABIN - DAY

Dust dissipates into the air.

Distressed, IM opens the door for Norton.

Norton puts the butt of his cigar in the ashtray and steps out. He puts his hat on and walks ahead toward the two figures.

TRUEBLOOD is built like a tank and carries two large concrete blocks. He places them beside his warped, rotting porch.

IM hesitates and catches up with Norton.

TRUEBLOOD
Can I help you, sir.

NORTON
I'm with the University.

Norton holds out his hand.

Trueblood slides the YOUNG GIRL holding the Child behind his giant figure.

TRUEBLOOD
What do you want?

NORTON
Is that your daughter?

The Girl peeks out from behind the Trueblood's arm.

TRUEBLOOD
You can't have her.

Norton's smile fades.

NORTON
No, no. I'm not--

IM
We were just passing by and--

TRUEBLOOD
It's true. Is that what you want to hear?

Norton studies Trueblood's face.

The young Girl steps out from behind him. The Child she carries is asleep.

Norton notices her pregnant stomach. His blue eyes turn back to Trueblood.

TRUEBLOOD (CONT'D)

It was an accident.

Norton removes his hat.

NORTON

An accid...

TRUEBLOOD

I thought I was dreaming.

Norton's pale skin blushes in the mid-day sun.

IM keeps his distance and stares at the dirt.

Norton stutters.

NORTON

How are you faring?

TRUEBLOOD

We're not doing too bad, sir. The white folks have taken an interest and even give us some money.

NORTON

Is that so.

TRUEBLOOD

Yes, sir. They were trying to run us out at first, but now they're going out of their way just because of curiosity. Even the biggity school folks.

Norton pats his forehead with a handkerchief. He removes his wallet and pulls out a one hundred dollar bill. He hands it Trueblood.

IM watches Trueblood crumple the bill in his hand.

NORTON

I'm sorry to--

The young Girl stares at Norton with deep, tired eyes.

Trueblood watches Norton as he sinks away. He stuffs the money into his overalls.

TRUEBLOOD

Thank you, sir.

Trueblood and IM trade glances.

INT. CAR - DAY

Smoke lingers in the back seat. Norton pats his forehead and breathes heavily.

IM
Are you feeling okay, sir?

NORTON
I think I need a stimulant, young man. A little whisky. It must be the heat.

IM
Yes, sir.

IM's eyes search nervously. He reads the street signs and turns left at a crossroads.

EXT. GOLDEN DAY PUB - DAY

IM pulls to a stop in front of a hole-in-the-wall bar.

A line of VETERANS marches in front of the car. They are wearing all gray uniforms.

INT. CAR - DAY

The DRUM MAJOR slaps his cane against the car.

DRUM MAJOR
Who the hell do you think you are, running down the army?

NORTON
What's going on?

IM
Veterans, sir. A little shellshocked.
(to Drum Major)
Get the hell out of General Pershing's way. He's in a rush.

DRUM MAJOR
General Pershing?

The Drum Major glances into the back seat and runs to his men.

IM drives into a parking spot.

Norton is pale and slouching.

IM turns off the car and waits.

NORTON

Hurry up, son.

IM

Yes, sir.

EXT. CAR - DAY

IM gets out of the car in a frenzy, buttons his jacket, straightens his tie, and marches tall into the pub.

INT. GOLDEN DAY - DAY

IM stands inside the door of the crowded bar. It is packed with MEN in gray shirts and pants and WOMEN in short, tight-fitting gingham aprons.

The rowdy CROWD obscures the bar. Conversations of war drift about.

IM steps forward. A large arm grabs his.

A STOLID-FACED MAN stares into his eyes.

STOL

It will occur at 5:30.

Stol laughs.

IM gets whisked away by the Crowd. He panics and elbows his way to the bar.

IM

Excuse me.

IM bursts through the line around the bar and waves his hand. HALLEY, the bartender, takes notice.

HALLEY

What do you want, schoolboy?

IM

Double whiskey. It's for somebody outside.

HALLEY

Hell no.

IM

What?

HALLEY

You're up at the school. Those bastards are still trying to close me up.

IM

I have a sick man in the car, Halley.

HALLEY

You never had no car.

IM

It's the white man's car. I need the whiskey.

HALLEY

Who's sick?

IM

The white man.

HALLEY

He too good to come in?

IM

I don't have time for this. He's a trustee.

HALLEY

Sorry, school boy. He wants whiskey, he'll have to come in here himself.

IM pounds the bar.

EXT. GOLDEN DAY - DAY

IM rushes out the door and taps on the window.

IM

Sir.

Norton is sweating and pale. IM opens the door and shakes him.

IM (CONT'D)

Sir!

Norton's breath wheezes through his lips.

IM panics and storms back into the noisy bar.

INT. GOLDEN DAY - DAY

IM hoists himself above the crowd.

IM
Halley, he's dying!

STOL
Somebody's always dying.

Halley shakes his head as he pours a drink.

HALLEY
Bring him in.

IM bolts back out to the car.

EXT. GOLDEN DAY - DAY

Two Veterans look through the window at Norton.

VET 1
Look, Sol. That's Thomas Jefferson.

SOL
I've been meaning to speak with him.

IM tears between them and pulls the door open.

IM
Give me a hand, would you? I need
to get this man inside.

VET 1
Sure.

They shuffle their feet as they carry the half-conscious Norton into the Golden Day.

INT. GOLDEN DAY - DAY

Halley waits in a cleared area in the center of the room.

IM and the Men push through the Crowd and lay Norton on the floor.

The Crowd encloses Norton.

CROWD
Get a chair for Mr. Eddy -- Jesus
H. Christ, that's John D.
Rockefeller.

HALLEY

Stand back.

The Veterans place the chair and lift Norton into it.

An OLD VETERAN kneels down and holds Norton's wrist.

OLD VET

This man has a pulse!

Halley pours a drink.

HALLEY

Tilt his head back.

A MAN grabs Norton's head, tilts it back, and slaps his face.

IM shudders.

HALLEY (CONT'D)

Are you a damn fool? Get that stoolie down here. Quick!

SLAPPY

A mild case of hysteria.

Stol catches IM's eye and points to his watch.

STOL

I told you. The absolute Armistice.

IM is scared stiff.

Halley tilts Norton's head back and dumps a glass of brandy down his throat.

Norton's limp body slouches in the chair and his arms hang wide open. Brandy streams down his cheeks.

HALLEY

Hold it under his nose.

IM takes the glass and waves it beneath Norton's nose.

Norton's eyes burst open. He flails and tries to sit up.

The Crowd hollers.

IM

Sir! You were unconscious, sir.

Norton is dazed.

NORTON

Where am I?

IM
This is the Golden Day. You requested
a drink.

NORTON
The Golden...

IM hands Norton the glass.

NORTON (CONT'D)
Thank you.

IM
I had to bring you inside to get a
drink. They wouldn't let me--

NORTON
What is this place?

HALLEY
The Golden Day. Used to be a church.
Then a bank, restaurant, a fancy
gambling house. Now it's ours.

The Crowd closes in around Norton.

MAN
All ours.

MAN 2
We're here for therapy.

MAN 3
Recharging our batteries.

OLD VET
I'm a doctor, let me take your pulse.

Old Vet grabs Norton's wrist.

MAN 2
I'm a student of the world.

Man 2 gestures dramatically.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)
It moves like a roulette wheel.
Circular. Black on top.

MAN
I turned blood into money, but John
D. Rockefeller stole it!

MAN 2
Epochs in the middle. Ethiopia shall
stretch her noble wings!

NORTON

Mr. Rockefeller? You must be mistaken.

MAN 3

Money on black!

MAN 2

In two years, I'll be old enough to give my mulatto mother a bath, the half-white bitch!

Man 2 leaps in a fury. The Crowd howls.

IM stands in disbelief.

BALCONY VOICE

What's going on down there?

The giant, chiseled, shirtless, SUPERCARGO, in white shorts and a bandanna towers over the rotting railing.

The Crowd quiets.

HALLEY

Charlene!

A WOMAN pokes her head out from behind a curtain in the balcony.

Halley jerks his head.

HALLEY (CONT'D)

Sober him up, we've got company.

CHARLENE approaches Supercargo but withdraws. A bottle flies by his head.

SUPERCARGO

Hey! I want order. Halley, you get me a double.

HALLEY

How are you going to keep order if you're drunk?

Another bottle flies up toward Supercargo. He stomps toward the stairs.

The Crowd moves as a single unit, pushing toward the base of the stairs.

CROWD

Get him!

A few MEN charge the stairs. Supercargo kicks one back down. He pulls with him another.

Men continue to flood the staircase. Supercargo fights them off. Liquor bottles are flying and shattering.

SUPERCARGO

Order!

Supercargo kicks another down the stairs. Men shove and punch each other. Bottles shatter. Men climb on and beat Supercargo.

HALF-DRESSED WOMEN appear from the balcony rooms and slap Supercargo.

WOMEN

He never pays!

IM searches for Norton. He sees him underneath the staircase.

Supercargo falls down the stairs, and the Crowd erupts. Men lift him up and drape him over the bar. Some cheer. Others hit the unconscious Supercargo in the ribs.

SOMEONE thumps an out-of-tune piano.

A MAN stands on another's shoulders and attempts to give a speech. He falls.

Halley is pours drinks and settles the crowd. He turns to IM.

IM

You better get the hell out of here,
school boy.

IM thrusts his way to the stairs.

Norton's eyes are closed in shock. A red scrape colors his forehead.

VOICE (O.S.)

He is only a man. A man!

A LARGE VETERAN appears underneath the stairwell.

BIG VET

Let's get him upstairs, son.

IM grabs Norton's ankles. The Vet grabs Norton's shoulders.

BEDROOM

Norton lies on a large, white bed with a brass headboard. He has an ice pack on his forehead.

The Vet checks Norton's pulse.

Norton slowly opens his eyes.

IM
He's a real doctor, sir.

THE VET
(to IM)
Go get a glass of water for the man.

IM whisks out the door.

BALCONY

IM leans over the railing.

IM
Halley! I need water.

Halley tosses an empty glass to IM. He catches it.

HALLEY
Door on your right.

BEDROOM

Norton is sitting upright on the bed.

NORTON
That's exactly the diagnosis I
received from my specialist. How
did you know that?

IM hands Norton a glass of water.

IM
Water, sir.

THE VET
I, too, was a specialist.

NORTON
Then what are you doing in this--

THE VET
I said I was.

NORTON
In the war?

The Vet leans away.

IM
Sir, we should get going now that
you're feeling better.

NORTON
Not yet.
(to The Vet)
Tell me what happened.

A woman, HESTER, enters the room.

HESTER
(to Norton)
You want a drink?

THE VET
Not now, Hester.

Hester approaches the bed.

HESTER
He's cute. Like a little baby.

THE VET
You're just saying that because he's
white.

The Vet stands up and grabs a small towel from a drawer.

THE VET (CONT'D)
We all know you prefer white men.

Hester grins.

The Vet returns to the bed. He sits and dabs Norton's head.

NORTON
I want to know what happened to you.

Hester leans in close to Norton. She touches his cheek.

HESTER
Be happy, white man.

Norton blushes. The Vet laughs.

THE VET
That's a good sign.

IM
He does look better. Much better.

Hester leaves.

THE VET
You want to know what happened.

NORTON

Yes.

The Vet shoots IM a glare.

THE VET

Perhaps it'll do you good to hear this. I wish someone would have told me when I was a student on the hill.

NORTON

You were a student at the University?

THE VET

Yes, I too was naive.

IM fingers his cuffs in discomfort.

THE VET (CONT'D)

Then I went to France with the Army Medical Corps.

NORTON

For how long?

THE VET

Long enough to forget some fundamentals.

Norton watches The Vet's eyes. The Vet smiles.

THE VET (CONT'D)

Things one ought to learn through experience.

IM

Sir, I think we should be leaving. You have your--

NORTON

Quiet, young man.

IM steps back.

NORTON (CONT'D)

But you were a successful physician.

THE VET

Yes, I performed my fair share of surgeries.

NORTON

Then why--

THE VET

There comes a time when you realize
your work can't bring you no dignity.

The Vet stares into Norton's eyes.

THE VET (CONT'D)

You hear that down below?

Pulsing from the raucous downstairs is heard.

THE VET (CONT'D)

That's the force of destruction you
hear. The sound you hear when you
realize you are what you are. The
sound of being canceled, perforated,
voided - a magnet to loose screws.

IM watches The Vet in awe.

THE VET (CONT'D)

They know nothing of value. So what
do you do?

NORTON

I don't understand.

THE VET

To some, you are the great white
father, to others the lyncher of
souls.

IM closes his eyes.

THE VET (CONT'D)

But to all, you are confusion. These
hands that learned so lovingly to
master a scalpel now yearn only to
caress a trigger. I returned to
save life, and I was refused. Ten
men in masks drove me out of the
city. They beat me with whips for
saving human life.

The Vet turns to face IM

THE VET (CONT'D)

Because of these hands. And because
I believed knowledge could bring me
dignity. You understand that?

IM

I don't know.

THE VET

Boy, you better learn to stop
listening and start digesting.

(MORE)

THE VET (CONT'D)

(to Norton)

You see him?

Norton looks at IM

THE VET (CONT'D)

He is a walking negative. Look at that African nose. He doesn't understand. Nothing has meaning. Why, he is invisible - the most perfect achievement of your dreams!

Norton's eyes widen.

NORTON

How dare you say that. He is my destiny. And so are you.

THE VET

Destiny!? Him?

NORTON

Yes. You both--

THE VET

(to IM)

The white man chases his destiny.

The Vet laughs hysterically. He stands.

THE VET (CONT'D)

He chases his destiny right into the Golden Day! How fitting!

NORTON

What do you mean?

THE VET

Led by a child.

NORTON

I came out of illness.

THE VET

Both of you fail to understand. Destiny! And this automaton! Neither of you can see each other.

(to IM)

And we. We are marks on his scorecard!

The Vet howls.

Norton stands in anger.

NORTON

Let's go, boy.

THE VET

He believes in you. With every beat
of his iron heart. You are not a
man to him. You are a force. A
God!

Norton and IM scurry out of the bedroom.

THE VET (CONT'D)

Go. Get the hell out of here, you
obscenities! Back into the blinding
light before I bash your heads!

INT. CAR - DAY

IM drives in silence.

Norton sits in the back seat like a stone. He stares out
the window.

EXT. CAR - DAY

Heat waves rise from the asphalt. The tire spins beside the
white dividing line on the road. The car kicks up dust. It
heads toward the green of campus.

INT. CAR - DAY

IM checks on Norton in the rear-view mirror.

IM

Shall I take you to your room, sir,
or to the admistrat--

NORTON

You'll take me to my room.

IM turns and slows in front of a building.

NORTON (CONT'D)

And bring Dr. Bledsoe to me.

IM shifts into park.

IM

Yes, sir.

EXT. CAR - DAY

The black car is parked between a large marble fountain and an staircase that ascends to an elaborate old, brick building.

IM gets out and opens Norton's door. Norton exits.

IM
Sir. I am very sorry. I--

NORTON
Send Dr. Bledsoe.

IM watches Norton walk away feebly.

IM
Yes, sir.

INT. BLEDSOE'S OFFICE - DAY

IM walks briskly into the administrative office.

STACY
Dr. Bledsoe has been looking for you.

IM storms past.

INT. BLEDSOE'S OFFICE - DAY

IM walks through Bledsoe's open door.

Bledsoe is on the phone.

BLEDSOE
Nevermind, he's here now.

Bledsoe hangs up and stands, grabbing his coat and hat.

BLEDSOE (CONT'D)
Where have you been, boy? Where's Mr. Norton?

IM
I took him to his room, sir.

BLEDSOE
Is he all right?

IM hesitates.

IM
Yes, he wishes to see you.

They stomp out of Bledsoe's office.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE - DAY

Stacy watches the two march past.

BLED SOE
Is something wrong?

IM
Not now, sir.

BLED SOE
What does that mean, not now?

IM
Well, Mr. Norton had some kind of
fainting spell.

BLED SOE
My God! I knew it. Why didn't you
call me?

They burst through the administrative office door and into
the hallway,

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE HALLWAY - DAY

They take giant steps across the glossy floor. IM keeps up.

IM
We were too far to phone, sir, I--

BLED SOE
What were were you doing that far
from campus?

IM
I took him where he wanted to go,
sir.

BLED SOE
Yes, and where was that?

IM hesitates.

IM
The slave-quarters.

Bledsoe stops.

BLEDSON

The quarters! You took a trustee out there?

IM

He asked me to, sir.

BLEDSON

Boy, don't you have the sense God gave a dog!? Come on.

They march down the hallway and out the door.

EXT. ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING - DAY

IM and Bledson walk heavily down the sidewalk to the neighboring hall.

BLEDSON

We take these white folks where we want them to go. Don't you know that?

IM

But, sir--

BLEDSON

We show them what we want them to see. Damn what he wants, you hear me?

INT. RABB HALL - DAY

IM lets Bledson walk ahead toward Norton's room. Bledson stops and turns around.

BLEDSON

I don't think so. Come with me.

They walk together past a row of doors. They eventually reach Norton's door. Bledson knocks. He avoids eye contact with IM.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

Mr. Norton? It's Dr. Bledson. We're coming in.

Bledson adjusts his tie and puts on a smile.

INT. NORTON'S ROOM - DAY

Bledsoe enters the room with IM following. The room is adorned with lavish lamps and Victorian furniture.

Norton is lying in bed.

BLEDSON

Mr. Norton. I've been worried about you. We were expecting you over an hour ago. My God, your head!

Bledsoe rushes to Norton's side.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

(to IM)

You never said anything about an accident.

NORTON

It's nothing.

BLEDSON

Get the doctor.

IM

It's already been taken care of, sir.

BLEDSON

I'm so sorry, Mr. Norton. I thought we sent you a careful, sensible young man. We've never had an accident, not in seventy-five years. I assure you, he will be severely disciplined.

Bledsoe glares at IM.

NORTON

There was no automobile accident. Nor was the boy responsible. You can send him away now.

IM's shoulders drop. He exhales.

BLEDSON

Don't be so kind, sir. This is unacceptable. It is most certainly his fault. He was in charge of you.

IM

It was out of my control, sir.

NORTON

I'll explain, young man. No further action will be taken.

(MORE)

NORTON (CONT'D)
(to Bledsoe)
Isn't that right?

BLEDSON
As you wish, sir.

IM looks to Norton.

IM
Thank you, sir.

BLEDSON
Go back to your room. And stay there
until chapel this evening, you
understand?

IM nods his head and exits.

INT. IM'S DORMITORY - DAY

IM lies face up on his bed, staring blindly at the ceiling,
still dressed in his working suit.

The room is small and dark. A desk lamp provides the only
light. The room is mostly bare with exception to a book
shelf in the corner and a few small appliances - organized
and clean.

IM stands before the mirror. He studies himself, fixes his
tie, and fingers his cuffs. His eyes fall to a newspaper
article tucked in the corner of the mirror.

The picture on the paper depicts a younger Bledsoe shaking
hands amid a group of older white MEN. The headline reads
"Educator, Leader, Statesman."

IM scans the article: "From slop dispenser to president...
began as office boy... Founder impressed... rose to...
history... success... determination... White House..."

Another picture shows Bledsoe shaking hands with the President
of the United States.

IM folds the article in half and tosses in a drawer. He
checks his pocket watch, flicks out the light, and exits.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

IM stares at the large marble statue of the kneeling Founder.

Muffled singing drifts from the Chapel - "Swing Low, Sweet
Chariot."

The orchestra swells from the chapel, and people exit.

IM turns from the statue and meanders past the street lamps, hands in pockets. He looks at the moonlit trees that line the greenspace.

The black and white clothed CHOIR MEMBERS march past him.

EXT. ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING - NIGHT

IM stands outside Bledsoe's building in the shadow of an oak tree. Light emits from the windows.

The familiar Cadillac pulls down the driveway and stops in front. Bledsoe gets out and walks into the building.

IM watches until the light in Bledsoe's office flicks on.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE - NIGHT

The building is silent with exception to the buzz of the lights.

IM walks past the Stacy's empty desk and stands quietly in Bledsoe's doorway.

BLEDSON'S OFFICE

Bledsoe is lit only partially by the small desk lamp. He wipes his neck with a white handkerchief.

BLEDSON

Come in.

IM walks in and sits down.

Bledsoe removes his glasses and replaces the handkerchief.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

I understand that you not only drove
Mr. Norton to the quarters but you
also took him to the Golden Day.

Bledsoe stares at IM.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

You had to administer the full
treatment, is that it?

IM

No, sir. He was ill and he needed a drink and--

BLED SOE

And that sink-hole is the only place you knew to go.

IM

Yes, sir.

BLED SOE

Of course. And why was he ill? Because of the quarters?

IM

He wanted to see the cabins, so--

BLED SOE

So, naturally you stopped. Boy! Weren't you behind the wheel?

IM

He ordered me to, sir.

BLED SOE

He ordered you!? Goddammit, white folk are always giving orders.

Bledsoe stands and paces.

BLED SOE (CONT'D)

You make up an excuse. You're black and living in the South. Did you forget how to lie!?

IM

Lie, sir? To a trustee?

BLED SOE

So, you chose instead to endanger the school.

IM

I was only trying to please him.

BLED SOE

Even the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! And you're a junior in college. Who told you to take him out there?

IM

He did, sir.

BLED SOE

Nigger, I'm no white man. You tell me the truth.

IM jolts back in terror.

IM

That is the truth, sir!

BLED SOE

Then who was that patient you were talking to?

IM

I've never seen him before.

BLED SOE

Well what did he say? Speak up!

IM

He was a doctor in the war. And he was in France, and--

BLED SOE

What else?

IM

And he said I believed that white was right.

Bledsoe suppresses a laugh.

BLED SOE

And you do, don't you?

IM

I don't know, sir.

BLED SOE

Boy, what do you know other than how to destroy an institution in half an hour that it took over a hundred years to build?

IM looks down.

IM

I'm sorry, sir. I had no intention of going there.

BLED SOE

I gave you an opportunity to serve one of our best white men - a man who could make you a fortune. I have no choice but to discipline you.

IM

But you gave Mr. Norton your word.

BLEDSON

I am the leader of this institution,
and this cannot pass unacknowledged.

IM bursts into an angry fury.

IM

I'll tell him.

IM stands.

IM (CONT'D)

I'll tell him you lied to both of
us!

BLEDSON

Are you threatening me in my own
office!?

IM

I'll tell everyone! I'll fight you,
I swear it!

Bledson laughs.

IM stands in furious confusion.

BLEDSON

Sit down. Sit.

IM sits on the edge of his chair.

Bledson moves to his chair, sits, puts on his glasses, and
speaks softly.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

You go right ahead and tell anyone
you like. I don't owe a thing to
anybody. I'm big and black and I
say, "Yessuh," when I need to, but I
am the king of this school. If you
learn one thing from this, it's that
power don't have to show off. Power
is confident, self-assuring, self-
starting and stopping, self-warming,
and self-justifying. And when you
have it, you know it.

IM sits back in shock.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

I only pretend to please those big
crackers.

(MORE)

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

They have newspapers, magazines,
radios, and spokesmen to tell lies
for them. They tell lies so well,
they become truths. So, go on.
Tell anyone you like. Because you're
nobody, son. You don't exist.

IM stares ahead in numbness. He stares at the portrait of
the Founder behind Bledson, looking down on him.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

I'm sending you to New York for the
summer. You go there and earn next
year's fees. Understand?

IM's focus snaps to Bledson.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

You're a fighter. I have to penalize
your lack of judgment, but the race
lacks smart, disillusioned fighters
like yourself. I'll give you some
letters to deliver that will ensure
you find work. That's all. You
have two days to close your affairs.

IM looks away from Bledson's eyes.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

IM walks in solitude down the path splitting the greenspace.
He passes beneath the trees, drifting in and out of shadow.

A pair of HARMONIOUS SINGERS pass.

IM looks to the individual lights in the dormitory windows.
One by one they flicker out.

IM collapses on a bench and slouches. He stares into the
ground.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

A younger IM gazes blankly into his Grandfather's coffin.

The Grandfather's eyes bolt open.

GRANDFATHER

Yes'm, yes'm, yes'm!

His Grandfather sits up, and IM jolts.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

Yes, yes, yes!

Grandfather laughs hysterically.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

IM's eyes are wide. He slows his breathing and sits up tall on the bench. He stands and walks into the night - his head held up.

INT. IM'S DORMITORY - NIGHT

IM counts his savings in the dim light - Fifty dollars. He packs his bags.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE HALLWAY - DAY

IM sits stoically outside of the locked administrative office. He turns his head at the sound of clicking shoes.

Bledsoe approaches.

BLEDSON

I didn't change my mind.

Bledsoe unlocks the office door.

IM stands.

IM

I didn't come for that, sir. Since I must leave, I'd like to go this morning.

Bledsoe pushes open the door and looks back to study IM.

IM (CONT'D)

I just want to say I'm sorry. And although what I did was unintentional, I accept my punishment. That's all.

BLEDSON

I can see you're beginning to learn. When do you intend to leave?

IM

By the first bus, if possible.

BLEDSON

Very well. Go get your bags and return in thirty minutes. My secretary will give you letters addressed to friends of the school.

IM

Thank you, sir.

IM turns to leave.

BLEDSON

One more thing.

IM turns back around.

BLEDSON (CONT'D)

Those letters are sealed, so if you want my help, you won't open them.

IM

I wouldn't do that, sir. Goodbye.

Bledson nods his head and pauses before entering the office.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

IM sits on a bench with two duffel bags. He flips through seven envelopes. He scans the names. He looks up at the sound of the bus and tucks the letters in one of the bags. He grabs his belongings, and hustles to the slowing bus.

INT. BUS - DAY

IM steps onto the bus. He moves to the back and sits in front of two conversing MEN. Their conversation halts.

MAN (O.S.)

Well, I'll be damned. We have a companion.

IM turns around. He is startled to see a smiling VET.

CRENSHAW, a smaller man, sits beside him.

IM

Morning.

THE VET

This is quite a coincidence, huh, Crenshaw?

IM is uncomfortable.

IM

I'm actually just taking a job in New York.

THE VET

New York? That's not a place, boy. It's a dream. When I was your age, all the little black boys ran away to Chicago.

IM

I'm not running--

THE VET

Out of the fire and into the melting pot. You're going to dance with white girls and all that.

The Vet slaps IM on the shoulder.

IM

I'll be working.

CRENSHAW

There are more than just white trash women in New York.

THE VET

But there's no greater symbol of freedom.

The Vet pats IM on the shoulder.

THE VET (CONT'D)

Going free in the broad daylight. We're an ass-backwards people. Used to have to commit a crime before you try such a thing.

CRENSHAW

Leave the boy alone. He's going North for the first time.

THE VET

I'm just saying there's always an element of crime in freedom.

IM

Where are you going?

THE VET

Washington D.C.

CRENSHAW

He was transferred.

THE VET

To St. Elizabeth's. It seems your
friend is quite mysterious.

IM

Norton? I don't think he had anything
to do with it.

The Bus rumbles and pulls away.

THE VET

Play the game, but don't believe in
it.

The Vet sits back in his seat.

IM leans against the window and closes his eyes.

CRENSHAW

When you talk, you don't say nothing.
You know that?

EXT. BUS - DAY

IM stares out the window. The reflection of foliage shrouds
his face.

The Vet and Crenshaw's bickering fades away.

INT. BUS - DAY

IM is asleep on an empty bus.

The bus squeaks to a halt, and IM wakes. He sits up straight.
He squints at the urban landscape out the window. He opens
his bag and removes the letters. He flips through them.

BUS DRIVER (O.S.)

You getting off here, buddy?

IM is startled.

IM

Yes, sir.

Im tucks away his letters and exits. He stops outside of
the door.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

IM turns to face the Bus Driver.

IM

How do I get to Harlem?

BUS DRIVER

Easy.

He points ahead.

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)

Go North.

He closes the doors and departs.

An eery silence lingers around the dilapidated brick complexes. IM walks north.

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

IM walks on the sidewalk. He looks every direction but in front of him. He sees boarded up windows and rusty fire escapes.

A BLACK AND WHITE CAT watches IM from a shattered windowsill.

IM halts at a busy intersection. The red light blinks. IM studies the BLACK TRAFFIC COP directing. The white cars filter through one by one. IM walks at his command and nods with a smile. He reaches the other side of the sidewalk.

A BLACK MAN with glasses is shoved out of an alley at IM's feet. His hands are scraped and bleeding.

IM jumps back and notices a small bandage in the shape of an 'X' on the man's right cheek.

The Man flips to his feet.

MAN

We going to chase them out!

A mixed group of RABBLE-ROUSERS are shoving and shouting down the alley.

A stout MAN IN MILITARY GARB stands on a ladder that leans against the brick behind a dumpster.

ROUSER

Tell 'em Ras!

Two SMILING WHITE POLICEMEN move toward IM from the end of the alley. They push aside the shouting men.

POLICEMAN

(to IM)

What can we do for you?

IM stutters.

IM
I'm just looking for the Men's House.

The Policemen study him.

POLICEMAN
That's all?

POLICEMAN 2
He's a stranger.

POLICEMAN 2 (CONT'D)
Two blocks, take a right.

IM
Thank you, sir.

The LADDER MAN shouts with a Jamaican accent. IM walks briskly.

INT. MEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Two faded green columns frame a splintered wooden door. Dust lingers. Small black and white square tiles create a large diamond on the floor. Paint peels from the walls.

The door unlatches.

IM is a silhouette against the outdoor light. He moves in slowly, passes the mailboxes, and ascends the stairs.

BEDROOM

The room is barren and barracks-style. A dull beige coats the walls.

IM opens the door. He flicks on the light. A bare bulb flickers and buzzes with a dim orange coil. He drops his belongings and lays on the bed. He falls asleep. Faint shouting penetrates the window. It fades to ticking.

INT. MEN'S HOUSE BEDROOM - DAY

IM reads his brass pocket watch and places it in the breast pocket of his best, black suit. He studies his appearance in the mirror, straightens his tie, grabs the stack of envelopes, and leaves.

EXT. FINANCIAL DISTRICT - DAY

IM looks up at the buildings and walks through the busy, narrow streets with rhythmic energy. He bumps shoulders with a fast walker. He reads the envelope, studies the height of an old, stone building, and walks through the heavy doors.

EXT. ELEVATOR - DAY

IM exits the elevator with a few others and enters a long marble hallway.

INT. MARBLE HALLWAY - DAY

IM walks nervously down the lavish hall. The clock reads 8:57. He notices a door's tag with the name, "T. Bates." He continues to the large window at the end of the hall. Through the blinds, in the distance, IM sees the torch of the Statue of Liberty.

EXT. BATES OFFICE - DAY

IM opens T. Bates' door.

Bookcases line the walls, and colorful leather chairs surround an oaken coffee table.

A RECEPTIONIST sits behind a desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Good morning.

IM clears his throat, clutching the envelope.

IM
Good morning. Is this Mr. Bates' office?

RECEPTIONIST
Yes it is. Do you have an appointment.

IM
No, ma'am.

The Receptionist sees the letter.

IM (CONT'D)
I--

RECEPTIONIST
Is that for Mr. Bates?

IM hands her the letter.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Just a minute please.

Over IM's shoulder is a picture of three old men smoking cigars and playing cards. He stands still and looks around the room.

The Receptionist returns.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, but Mr. Bates is tied up this morning. If you'll leave your address here, he will reach you by mail.

IM signs his address on the note card.

IM
I can be reached here anytime.

RECEPTIONIST
Thank you.

IM hesitates and leaves the office.

EXT. FINANCIAL DISTRICT - DAY

IM exits the Bates building and stands outside the front door. He stares down the narrow stone street. PEOPLE cross left and right through his vision. IM disappears into the crowd.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

IM navigates through the busy streets, walking against the flow of People, all dressed in black and white business suits.

IM speaks to a RECEPTIONIST, pauses, and reluctantly removes an envelope from his satchel.

IM sits in a subway car.

IM speaks to ANOTHER RECEPTIONIST. He holds the envelope and tries to walk past the desk. The Receptionist stops him, and IM gives up another envelope.

IM checks his mailbox. Empty.

IM walks down more busy streets. Day turns to night. Night to day.

The envelopes sticking out of his satchel disappear one by one until only two remain.

Empty mailbox.

A RECEPTIONIST speaks to IM. Her lips motion, "...leave your address..." She smiles and slides a piece of paper across the desktop.

IM clicks a pen. He writes a letter at a desk in his bedroom. The letter includes text like "To whom it may concern... message from Dr. Bledsoe... request an appointment."

The last envelope, addressed to "Mr. Emerson," rests on the desktop.

IM reads his pocket watch. The shadows on the wall shift as night turns to day.

A single letter occupies IM's mailbox. He removes it.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

IM walks down the sidewalk in his business best. He walks tall.

A raspy blues song grows in volume.

SINGER (O.S.)

(singing)

She's got feet like a monkey. Legs
like a frog. Lord, lord. But when
she starts to loving me, I holler
Whooo. God-dog!

IM waits at a crosswalk. A shopping cart filled with blue rolls of paper nearly runs into him. IM ignores it.

A scruffy HOMELESS MAN pushes the cart.

HOBO

(to IM)

Hey there, Daddy-O.

IM glances at him.

HOBO (CONT'D)

Tell me this. Is you got the dog
this fine morning?

IM

Dog?

HOBO

Sure. Is you got the dog?

(pause)

Got. The. Dog?

IM smiles in confusion.

HOBO (CONT'D)

Goddog, Daddy-O. Who got the damn dog? Nobody out here but us. Is you got him or not?

IM

No, sorry. Not today.

HOBO

Damn. I though for sure you had him. Maybe he got you.

IM

Maybe.

HOBO

Well then, you're lucky. I got a bear a-hold of me.

IM

A bear?

HOBO

Hell yeah! This a den we in. And I'm about to turn that bear loose!

IM notices the blue paper rolls.

IM

What do you have there?

HOBO

Blueprints. Damn near a hundred of them, and I can't build nothing. They picked poor Robin clean.

IM

What are they for?

HOBO

Everything. Cities, towns, mansions, paper houses. Somebody done changed their plans. Say, Daddy-O. Name's Wheatstraw. I'm the seventh-son-of-the-seventh-son-born-with-a-caul-over-both-the-eyes-and-raised-on-black-cat-bones-high-john-the-conqueror-and-greasy-greens.

(MORE)

HOBO (CONT'D)

You dig?

IM

You're too fast for me.

WHEATSTRAW

You're from the old country... All it takes in this town is a little shit, grit, and mother-wit.

IM

I'll keep that in mind.

WHEATSTRAW

I reckon I'll be seeing you around, Daddy-O.

Wheatstraw pushes his cart around the corner.

WHEATSTRAW (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(singing)

Legs. Legs like a mad bulldog.

The traffic flow ceases. IM crosses the street.

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - DAY

IM pushes through a shiny wooden door with brass handles.

Emerson's large reception room is adorned like a museum - boldly colored walls, elaborately framed paintings, bronze statues, and marble pedestals. A small aviary with a parrot and other exotic birds is in one corner.

IM approaches the Receptionist, EMERSON JR, a young blonde-haired man with glasses.

IM

I have an appointment with Mr. Emerson regarding a letter from Doctor Bledsoe at the University of--

EMERSON JR

Yes. May I see the letter please?

IM hands the letter to Emerson Jr whose cuffs are complemented with shiny, gold links.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

I'll be with you shortly.

IM takes a seat in a luxurious, velvet chair between two large trees. He studies items in the room.

Emerson Jr opens the door with hesitation.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)
Come in please.

IM stands up quickly and passes him.

IM
Thank you.

Emerson Jr closes the door.

INT. EMERSON JR'S OFFICE - DAY

IM slows his pace into an empty office. EMERSON JR follows him in and closes the door.

EMERSON JR
I need to ask you a few questions.

He points to sit. IM sits hesitantly.

IM
Yes, sir.

EMERSON JR
Why are you here?

IM
I need a job, sir. I need to make enough money to return to school in the fall.

EMERSON JR
And when do you expect to graduate?

IM
In one year. I've already completed my junior classes.

EMERSON JR
So you're what, twenty years old?

IM
Almost.

EMERSON JR
I see. What if you had the opportunity to finish your schooling at a different college?

IM tries to respond.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)
In New England, say.

IM is intrigued, but afraid to answer.

IM

I don't know, sir. I only have one year left, and the people at my old school are--

EMERSON JR

I understand. I apologize for asking you this. It's rather embarrassing.

IM

No, please.

EMERSON JR

Did you read the letter you brought to Mr. Emerson?

IM

No, sir. I wouldn't do that.

EMERSON JR

Of course not.

IM

Was it opened--

EMERSON JR

Tell me. What are your plans after graduation?

IM

I'd like to remain at the college, either as a teacher or administrative assistant. To Dr. Bledsoe, perhaps.

EMERSON JR

You're very ambitious.

IM

I work hard, sir.

EMERSON JR

Ambition can be a wonderful force. How many of these letters did you distribute?

IM

About seven--

EMERSON JR

Seven!

IM is stiff.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

You haven't spoken to any of these gentlemen, have you...

IM

No, sir. And this is my last letter. So, if I could please speak to Mr. Emerson, it--

EMERSON JR

Have you ever been to Club Calamus?

IM

Club Calamus? No, sir. I don't have the time or money to--

EMERSON JR

The reason I ask is... Well. Do you believe two strangers can speak with sincerity? To do away with custom and converse honestly?

IM

I suppose, sir, but I'm not sure what you mean.

EMERSON JR

I don't want to upset you--

IM

Look, I appreciate your time, but speaking frankly, I'd like to see Mr. Emerson now.

IM starts to get up.

EMERSON JR

I'm afraid there is a tyranny involved.

IM returns to his seat.

IM

Excuse me?

EMERSON JR

Because to help you, I must disillusion you.

IM

Well, once I see Mr. Emerson, it will be up to me. I just need to speak to him.

EMERSON JR

No one speaks to him.

There is an abrupt change in tone.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)
Mr. Emerson does the speaking.

Emerson Jr stands up.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)
You know what. You better just leave
your address.

IM stands.

IM
Give me five minutes. I'll prove
I'm worthy of a job. And if someone
has tampered with the letter, I'll
clear that up. I'll prove my identity--

EMERSON JR
Identity. Yes. We're Jim and Huck
here. The sooner you realize that,
the better.

Emerson Jr lights a cigarette and sits on his desk. He
adjusts his glasses.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)
Look. Take my advice, and forget
about your college. There's nothing
there for you. And I'm not saying
that to give myself some kind of
sadistic catharsis. I, unlike many
people here, actually want to help
you.

IM
If that's the case, then let me speak
to Mr. Emerson. Sir, I only want a
job.

EMERSON JR
Well, I'm afraid you live too simply.

IM
You have something against me. What
is it? What did I do to you? I'm
not endangering your job.

EMERSON JR
No, no. You've misunderstood. I'm
not trying to prevent you from seeing--

IM
You most certainly are.
(MORE)

IM (CONT'D)

You read the letter, and you're refusing to let me see him. What are you trying to do? A northern white man. I know what's best for me. So if Mr. Emerson is unavailable today, tell me when I can speak to him. And I'll be there.

EMERSON JR

I'm sorry. I'm very sorry I started this. I have nothing against you.

IM

Well, you might want to consider your words in the future.

EMERSON JR

Mr. Emerson is my father.

IM freezes.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

I would have preferred it otherwise to be sure. But seeing him will do you no good.

Emerson Jr extinguishes his cigarette.

IM

I'll take my chances.

EMERSON JR

Dr. Bledsoe ought to be horsewhipped. Here.

Emerson Jr slides the folded letter to IM.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

Read it.

IM

I wasn't asking to--

EMERSON JR

Fine. I'll read it.

Emerson Jr sweeps up the letter and adjusts his glasses.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

(Reading with false
joy)

My dear Mr. Emerson. The bearer of this letter is a former student of ours. I say former because he shall never under any circumstance be enrolled here again.

Emerson Jr pauses for a moment and looks at IM before standing and continuing.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

Due to circumstances, the nature of which I'll explain to you in person. Yeah, yeah. Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit.

(to IM)

I'm paraphrasing.

(returning to the text)

This young man is to have no knowledge of the finality of his expulsion. We held great expectations, and they have gone grievously astray.

IM drops into the chair.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

Thus, it is highly important that you help him continue in the direction of the promise, which like the horizon, recedes ever so brightly beyond the hopeful traveler.

Emerson Jr tosses the letter on the desk.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

Rather poetic at the end there.

IM sees Bledsoe's signature on the letter.

IM

What did I do?

EMERSON JR

You must have done something.

IM shakes his head.

EMERSON JR (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. He is a very complicated man.

IM

There must be some mistake.

EMERSON JR

Don't blind yourself. There's no point.

IM stands, gathers his things, and turns to leave.

IM

Thank you for your time.

EMERSON JR

Wait. I may know of a job.

IM pauses, reluctantly. The sound of heavy footsteps emerges.

INT. LIBERTY PAINTS WHITE HALLWAY - DAY

Shiny black shoes, speckled with white paint, click down a glassy white tiled floor in huge strides.

IM waits at the end of a hallway and holds his satchel by the handle.

A large, WHITE MAN in a white jump suit barrels toward him.

A sign on the wall behind IM reads, "Keep America Pure With Liberty Paints."

MAN

You coming from Emerson's?

IM makes his shaking hand free.

IM

Yes, sir. I'm here to work.

The Man rolls his eyes and thrusts a hard hat in IM's stomach. IM reads his name tag: KIMBRO

Kimbrow turns the corner.

KIMBRO

This way. You're the sixth this month. Whatever keeps us from paying union wages.

IM follows, matching Kimbro's long strides.

HALL

KIMBRO

Put your shit in there.

Kimbrow points to the locker room. IM hesitates.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)

Hurry up! I don't have all goddamn day.

IM enters the locker room and selects a locker.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)

You might want to change colors.

LOCKER ROOM

IM's motions slow down as he removes his black suit jacket.

KIMBRO

That shit'll be white by the end of
the week.

IM notices the paint specks on Kimbro's black shoes.

IM

Yes, sir.

IM stuffs his belongings into the locker and exits.

HALL

IM follows Kimbro down a long hall of offices. Conversations
scream out the doors. IM tries not to look.

VOICE (O.S.)

I don't give a damn! Hire a goddamn
pigeon, so long as it's moving.

KIMBRO

We're the biggest outfit in the
business. Paint for the government,
mostly. Offices, monuments, the
fucking statue of liberty herself.
You name it, we paint it.

They turn another corner.

GRAY HALLWAY

The pearly white halls turn into a gray, mechanical, steaming
sector. Large factory doors are open. Machines rumble
inside. MEN in white jump suits and hard hats run about.
They drive fork lifts loaded with buckets.

KIMBRO

Always pay attention. We got cans,
buckets, and drums running back and
forth twenty-four seven.

Kimbro nearly clotheslines IM to stop him from walking into
a forklift crossing the hallway.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)

Did you hear me! Pay attention, or
you'll get run the fuck over.

IM adjust his hat. Kimbro strides ahead.

KIMBO
I don't have time to repeat things,
so follow instructions the first
time. You got that?

IM
Yes, sir.

KIMBO
Good. This way.

OPTIC WHITE ROOM

Kimbro ducks into a dark room lined with buckets, some empty, some full. Steam rushes through vents in the walls. Pipes twist and turn out of the ceiling, into large steel units, and out into the walls.

Kimbro dodges the spiraling pipes and moves into a darker corner. He grabs a full bucket and rips off the lid.

KIMBO
Look here.

IM retracts his face from the stench of the milky brown substance. Kimbro inhales deeply and grabs a stick from his tool belt. He stirs the substance.

KIMBO (CONT'D)
Goddamn it. Here.

He hands the stick to IM.

KIMBO (CONT'D)
You got to put dope in every goddamn
bucket.

Kimbro leaves the room.

KIMBRO (O.S.)
And in time to get them out of here
by noon.

Kimbro returns with a white cylinder and a large eye-dropper tool.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
Ten drops, no more, no less. You
got it?

IM looks into the cylinder.

IM
Yes, sir. Easy enough.

It is filled with syrup-like, black liquid. He sucks up some liquid with the dropper.

KIMBRO
Ten.

IM kneels to the bucket and starts dripping.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
Not so goddamn fast! Jesus Christ.

Kimbro grabs a few two by fours leaning against the wall.

IM pauses and looks at the cylinder.

IM
What is this stuff?

KIMBRO
Dope.

IM
Dope.

KIMBRO
Nevermind how it looks.

IM drops more of the black liquid onto the paint. Each drop slips to the edge of the bucket like oil on grease.

IM
I just want to understand what I'm doing.

KIMBRO
Don't think so goddamn hard. Just do what you're told.

IM finishes dropping and sets his tools aside.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
Now, once you got ten drops, take that stick and stir the shit out of it.

IM stirs.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
Stir until it's whiter than your eyes. Optic white. That's good. Now you paint a sample on one of these.

Kimbro hands IM a board and a large paint brush. IM paints.

IM
It's white all right.

KIMBRO
The purest white there is. That's
it. Do five or six at a time, and
be sure to go back and check the
samples.

Kimbro checks his watch.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
And for Christ's sake move faster.
We got to get these to Washington.
And when you're out of dope, refill
back in the tank room.

Kimbro starts walking out.

KIMBRO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I've got to get to a meeting. So
keep it up!

IM
If...

IM turns back to his optic white bucket and replaces the
lid.

A pyramid of one hundred buckets stands in front of him.
The room falls silent with exception to the deep breathing
of steam that hums through the vents.

IM holds the nearly-empty cylinder. A large steel unit howls
into a thunderous shaking. IM jolts and spills the remainder
of the liquid. He stands and enters the tank room.

TANK ROOM

Four tanks with corroded spigots protrude from the back wall.
Different illegible scribbles label each tank.

IM turns on the first spigot. A clear liquid run out.

He turns on the second. Same.

He turns on the third. A syrup-like black substance runs
out.

He tries the fourth. Same as the third.

IM smells the cylinder. He smells the third spigot then
smells the fourth.

He fills the cylinder with liquid from the fourth tank. IM twists off the spigot and exits the tank room.

OPTIC WHITE ROOM

Most of the buckets are stacked on the opposite side of the room. Multiple painted boards line the wall behind IM.

IM's hands and arms are white. Specks of white paint cover his face and clothes. He is stirring slowly and painfully.

A door bursts open. Kimbro enters. IM jumps to his toes.

KIMBRO
How's it coming?

IM
I've done seventy-five.

KIMBRO
Not bad.

Kimbro runs his hand over a painted board.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
This shit's still wet.

IM stands. Kimbro smells his hand.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
Have you been checking these? What did you do? Jesus Christ. They take away my men and now--

IM
I followed your directions, sir.

Kimbro rips the cylinder from IM's hands. He looks at it, dips his pinky into it, and tastes it.

KIMBRO
Oh, for fuck sake! Where did you get this?

IM
From the tank room.

KIMBRO
Goddamn it, boy!

Kimbro enters the tank room.

KIMBRO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Why we hire you idiots...

IM follows him in.

TANK ROOM

Kimbro checks the spigots.

KIMBRO
Don't tell me you drew from this
one.

Kimbro points to tank four.

IM
Sir, you didn't tell me which tank
to use.

KIMBRO
Are you trying to sabotage me?

IM
No, sir. It smelled the same.

KIMBRO
Smelled!

IM
Yes, sir.

KIMBRO
Boy, we make paint! You can't smell
shit for miles! And now you've just
dumped concentrated remover into
those barrels. Goddamnit!

IM
I'm sorry, sir, but you didn't tell
me which tank to--

KIMBRO
Use some goddamn sense, and ask for
Christ's sake.

Kimbro fills the cylinder from tank three and darts back
into the optic white room. IM follows.

OPTIC WHITE ROOM

Kimbro rips lids off of IM's buckets.

KIMBRO
Fuck it. Start stirring.

Kimbro drips the liquid rapidly into buckets.

IM stirs one and paints a sample. The sample is flat gray.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
Let me see that.

Kimbrow examines. IM is ashamed.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
That's better.

IM glances back to the board in shock. It is flat gray. IM squints.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
All right, get the hell out of here.
I'll finish these myself.

IM backs away.

KIMBRO (CONT'D)
You know what. Go downstairs and
find Lucius.

IM
Lucius?

KIMBRO
Yeah. Brockway. He's in charge
down there. You'll work for him.

IM wipes his brow in relief.

IM
Thank you.

KIMBRO
I'm not doing you a favor. If you
fuck up down there, no one will tell
you. You'll just feel it.

IM turns around. He glances back to Kimbro and the gray boards.

IM
Yes, sir.

LIBERTY PAINTS HALL

IM exits the Optic White room and moves down the hall. The hallway grows darker, and the gray steel walls turn to black. Steam bursts through a vent in the floor. Clanking and squealing emerge from turning gears underfoot.

The large, steel door at the end of the hall has a white sign with a black arrow pointing downward.

IM opens the heavy, sticking door.

LIBERTY STAIRWELL

A steel-grated, spiral staircase wraps around a rocket-like cylinder.

IM looks through the grate under his feet. Complete darkness. The machines hum louder.

IM walks slowly around the windowless, industrial castle tower staircase. He makes his way lower and lower, penetrating pockets of steam until all sense of direction is lost. He finds the end of the stairs.

A single red bulb, enclosed by a cage, lights a large, grease-smeared door. IM hesitantly pulls the handle, and steam wheezes through the seal.

ATRIUM

Pistons pulse along the walls. Gears crunch underfoot. Steel pipes twist over head. The room vibrates. The air is gray. This is the heart of a giant machine.

IM walks slowly, and the door slams behind him.

VOICE (O.S.)

Who's there!

IM freezes. Sweat pours down his face.

A small, old MAN dressed in a pinstriped engineer's hat walks around the corner. He wipes wrenches with rags. His face is dark with soot. Only the whites of his eyes are visible.

MAN

I said who is it!

IM

I'm looking for Lucius, sir. Lucius Brockway.

The Man approaches IM. IM can see scars across his cheek and on his hands. He is a foot shorter than IM.

MAN

I'm Mister Brockway.

IM

Mister Brockway. I was se--

BROCKWAY

What do you want?

IM

Kimbro sent me down here to work for you, sir.

BROCKWAY

Kimbro. That son of a bitch. He knows damn well I've been running this plant for years without an assistant. Must think I'm getting old.

IM

No, I don't think he--

BROCKWAY

Must be looking to replace me. You an engineer?

IM

No, sir.

BROCKWAY

You sure?

Brockway moves in closer. He flings the rag over his shoulder.

IM

I'm no engineer, sir. I'm just here to do what I'm told.

Brockway laughs.

BROCKWAY

Is that right?

Brockway hands IM the rag.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)

In that case, wipe down those pressure gauges.

IM

Yes, sir.

IM maneuvers to a series of gauges, each connected to a web of small pipes. Large red wheels sit atop each gauge. Seven giant vats are set into the wall.

IM wipes the filthy glass.

Brockway faces a wall of valves and switches them on and off, producing hysterical hisses and whistles.

BROCKWAY

Usually they send down some white boy who thinks he's going to run me out.

IM wipes the second gauge.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)

How much pressure you got on that one?

IM wipes and reads.

IM

Forty-three and two-tenths pounds.

Brockway moves to a makeshift desk atop a low, rectangular vent. He scribbles a note on some dirty paper.

BROCKWAY

You read awful good for not being an engineer.

IM

I learned that in my high school physics class.

BROCKWAY

High school! Well I'll be goddamned.

Brockway moves over to IM.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)

That'll be one of your jobs then. Every fifteen minutes, you check them, and write the numbers in that book. You got it?

IM

Yes, sir.

BROCKWAY

And keep a special eye on that son of a bitch.

Brockway points to the fifth gauge in the line.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)

He's been acting up lately. He gets past 75, you yell. And yell loud!

IM

No problem.

Brockway removes a large engineer's watch from his pocket. He rubs the faces with his thumb.

BROCKWAY

So, what are you doing here? You friends with one of those colored boys upstairs?

IM

I'm sorry, who?

BROCKWAY

In the lab.

IM

No, sir. A man I know told me about this job. Kimbro had me administering dope this morning, and now he's sent me down here.

Brockway looks IM over. IM returns to wiping gauges.

BROCKWAY

You finish wiping. When I get back, we're going to open up some valves.

IM

Alright.

IM watches Brockway leave the room. IM flips the rag over his shoulder and moves into the shadows near Brockway's desk. He steps up onto a raised platform.

Hand-drawn blueprints for complex machines are on the desk. A few tiny models crafted meticulously from wire sit atop the desk. Small gears and batteries are scattered about. A chess piece - black king. Drawings of pipes are crossed out and rerouted. IM shuffles through Brockway's drawings.

A door opens, and IM returns to the last gauge.

IM (CONT'D)

It's getting a bit louder over here.

Brockway appears around the corner of the steel vat.

BROCKWAY

Oh, it's loud alright. Follow me.

IM follows Brockway, ducking underneath pipes and vents. They move in and out of intense shadow.

Blue flames glow around the edges of three furnaces in the rear of the area.

Brockway flicks on a buzzing orange light. Sweat flows down IM's face.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)

Here we are.

Brockway moves over a row of large valves, similar to the gauges but larger. The steel vats rumble.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
When I give you the signal, turn
them wide open.

IM positions himself in front of the first valve.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
Let her go!

IM turns the valve with power. Liquid rushes. A buzzer sounds.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
Close it!

IM reverses the valve, grunting.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
Quickly! For Christ's sake!

An exhaust pipe smokes and discharges a dark, grainy material.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
Grab a scoop.

IM grabs a shovel from the wall and scoops a large load into the adjacent bin. He continues until the bin is full.

IM
What is this stuff?

Brockway moves to a valve and opens it up.

BROCKWAY
The guts!

A quick internal explosion turns into the scream of a saw. IM backs away. The dark grains filter through some pipes. The air turns gray.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
She's cooking now. To the fire!

Brockway flips a bright orange switch. The blue glow around the furnace flares and turns red.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
This is where the real paint is made.

IM
I thought they made it upstairs.

BROCKWAY

Nope. Right here. They just make it look pretty up there.

IM

So that's it, huh? I was wondering what you did down here.

BROCKWAY

Boy, I run this plant! And nobody knows it. Not a single drop of paint gets pushed that ain't run through Lucius Brockway's hands.

IM

How long have you been down here?

Brockway twists another valve.

BROCKWAY

Long enough to learn how shit works. Liberty Paints wouldn't be worth a nickel without me.

IM

I believe you.

Brockway closes the first valve. The hissing turns to a hum.

BROCKWAY

In all my years, I've missed one day of work. One. They sent me home on leave. Best day I ever had. Made a flask of peach schnapps and went skiing. It wasn't an hour before the paint was bleeding and wrinkling. I'm the only son of a bitch who knows a goddamn thing about paint in this plant.

IM

You're the machine, Mister Brockway.

BROCKWAY

You're damn right. I got this place in my head so good, I could trace out every last nut and bolt.

IM

That's remarkable.

Brockway closes the other valve.

BROCKWAY

It's because I learn with my hands
and not out of some damn book. Watch
them gauges!

IM rushes back over to the row of gauges.

IM (O.S.)

They're okay!

BROCKWAY

Keep an eye out. We're the machines
inside the machine, don't forget
that!

IM marks the numbers on a note pad.

Brockway walks to his desk.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)

We make the best white paint in the
world.

IM

Optic white.

BROCKWAY

That's right.

(Quoting)

If it's Optic white, it's the right
white! That line made me three
hundred dollars.

IM

If you're white, you're right.

Brockway laughs.

BROCKWAY

Lunch time, boy.

Brockway grabs a mug.

IM

I left my lunch in the locker room
upstairs.

Brockway slows.

BROCKWAY

Well, hurry up and get back down
here. Keep an eye on that gauge.

Brockway watches IM leave and turns into a cubby hole
containing a ladder.

INT. LIBERTY PAINTS HALL - DAY

IM, doused in charcoal dust, walks down the Optic White hall. He turns into the locker room.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

IM opens the door, and the chatter halts. MEN in splattered uniforms are gathered on the benches.

MAN 1
Come on in, brother. There's plenty
of room.

IM
I'm just getting my lunch.

MAN 2
Weren't you told about the meeting?

IM
What meeting? No, sir. I was not.

MAN 3
I told you the bosses aren't
communicating.

MAN 1
Well, perhaps you'd like to join us?

Man 1 approaches IM suspiciously.

IM
I'd like to get my lunch now.

MAN 1 moves aside. IM grabs his lunch and leaves briskly.

MAN 1
If you change your mind, you know
where to find us.

INT. ATRIUM - DAY

IM hustles into Brockway's lair.

Brockway sits casually on a white bucket. He drinks from a white mug and avoids eye contact with IM.

IM takes a quick peek at the gauges, sits on a nearby ledge, and opens his lunch.

Brockway stands slowly. He places the mug on his desk and ambles over to IM in a trance-like motion.

Brockway swats IM's lunch from his hands.

BROCKWAY
Get out of my basement.

IM is pinned against the wall.

IM
Excuse me?

BROCKWAY
Get out of my basement! Shut up and get!

Brockway shoves him.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
You two-bit union snake!

IM
I don't belong to a union.

BROCKWAY
I'll kill you.

Brockway reaches for IM's throat.

IM
You'll do what?

BROCKWAY
I'll kill you! You, you no good son of a bitch!

IM grabs Brockway's wrists.

IM
Look here, you old fool. Don't you threaten me.

Brockway hits IM in the face. IM punches back. Brockway picks up an iron bar.

IM (CONT'D)
Put it down, old man.

BROCKWAY
I done told you. Now, I'm going to bash your brains out.

Brockway charges IM. IM ducks low and tackles Brockway. He rips the bar from Brockway's grasp. It slides across the floor.

Brockway swats. IM counters in the face, stands, and moves away.

IM
I'm a third your age. What's wrong
with you?

Brockway struggles on the ground.

IM (CONT'D)
You old-fashioned, slave-time, mammy-
made bastard! You can't threaten
me. I was sent down here. I don't
know a damn thing about you or the
unions or this hell-hole of a factory.
And you're riding my ass as soon as
I get down here. You've been sniffing
too much paint.

IM moves around Brockway.

IM (CONT'D)
Hell, you're probably drinking it.

IM smashes Brockway's mug. Brockway mumbles and sits up.

IM (CONT'D)
You want more?

BROCKWAY
Can a man get his teeth?

IM
Teeth?

A hissing sound emerges.

Brockway crawls over to vat. He reaches out and grabs a set
of false teeth. He replaces them. He stands nimbly and
nearly falls. IM catches him, and places him on the ledge.

BROCKWAY
They're after my job. They're going
to chase me out this plant.

IM
I am not the unions.

BROCKWAY
You colored lab rats are ruining our
jobs. You should be lucky you even
have one.

Hissing grows powerful.

BROCKWAY (CONT'D)
I told you to watch those gauges.
Turn the valve!

The room vibrates. IM runs to the valves.

IM

Which one?

BROCKWAY

White!

IM twists frantically. Buzzing pierces the air. Lights flash. Steam bursts through pipes overhead.

IM

Hey!

IM looks back to Brockway. He is gone.

IM (CONT'D)

HEY!

IM looks at the gauge. The needle pushes into the red. A piece of steel explodes and whizzes past IM's head. IM turns to escape. The floor turns upward. The vat explodes. The room is covered with white paint. Steel pipes ricochet into IM's abdomen, knocking him over. The ceiling caves in. Blinding flash.

Cut TO WHITE

CRACKLING RADIO VOICE (V.O.)

Harry, I'm telling you. It ain't me you're looking at. Ain't me your confidential looks incriminate. But that other person. That other person you thought I was.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Everything is bright white.

IM lies horizontally in a glass container. His eyes are closed.

The reflection of a DOCTOR looking at IM through the glass is cast over IM's face.

DOC

What is your name?

IM sighs.

DOC (CONT'D)

What is your name? Address?

IM's eyes dart open and look around tiredly. He sucks in air.

IM
The eye inside.

DOC
Eye?

IM looks through the glass cover. The vertex of the panels distorts the Doc's face. Doc wears white overalls.

VOICE (O.S.)
Let's run an x-ray.

IM's eyes roll as humming vibrates his pod. His vision blurs. A large machine darkens his vision.

IM grunts.

DOC
Hush, goddamnit. We're trying to
get you started again.

Whiteness takes over.

IM sees two Men standing over him - The Doc and the PERSON with the second voice.

VOICE (O.S.)
You're alright.

IM
Doctor.

IM's voice is stifled inside the container.

Another MAN appears. He wears a dark suit, hat, and sunglasses. He holds a card to the glass in front of IM's face. It reads, "WHO ARE YOU?"

IM blinks heavily. The Man in Black removes the card. Doc leans in.

DOC
Here, take this. It's good for you.

Doc reaches through a spongy hole near IM's head. It pushes a pill down IM's throat.

IM's vision blurs.

Another card is placed on the glass reading, "YOU ARE BUCKEYE THE RABBIT."

The Dark Man disappears, laughing.

IM's pod is tilted upright. IM stands stiffly.

Doc opens the glass.

IM

Where am I?

DOC

Factory hospital. Now just relax a moment.

Doc pulls a few electrodes from IM's stomach, grabs shears, and cuts a large cord connected to IM's back.

A WOMAN in light overalls walks in with a clipboard and folded clothes.

WOMAN

(to IM)

You're a new man.

Doc tilts IM's chin up and shines a light in his eyes.

IM

Do you know Mr. Norton? Or Bled?

DOC

Why, no. Are they friends?

IM

Yeah.

DOC

I'm sorry, I don't. Take a step for me.

IM steps forward.

IM

Of course not. They picked poor Robin clean.

DOC

Here are your clothes, and I need you to sign this.

Doc hands him a blank sheet of paper. IM signs and takes his clothes.

DOC (CONT'D)

Take care of yourself now.

IM

You too, sir. Thank you. We've had a nice palaver, you and I.

DOC

Yes, indeed.

IM

Yes, indeed.

EXT. SUIT SHOP - NIGHT

IM walks confidently from a men's clothing store. He wears a new suit and hat. His eyes stare ahead as he moves through the city crowd.

A VENDOR shouts from his wagon.

VENDOR
Get your Carolina yams! Hot and
sweet and good to eat! Hot damn, a
dime a yam!

IM stops.

IM
It's been a long time since I've
smelled yams like that.

VENDOR
You a Carolina man?

IM
Where I come from, yams are a culinary
opus. I'll take two.

The Vendor chuckles.

VENDOR
(Imitating a soldier)
You got it, sir! Two hot and yellows
for the southern fellow.

IM laughs.

IM
I yam what I am.

The Vendor hands the yams to IM. Shouting from across the street catches IM's attention.

VENDOR
Enjoy.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Two LARGE MEN toss a giant wooden chest onto the curb beside a couch and other household furniture. A chanting CROWD surrounds.

IM bites his yam and moves toward the action. He tosses the foil into the street.

EXT. CITY SIDE STREET - NIGHT

IM walks up and stands next to a black MAN WITH AN 'X' SHAPED BANDAGE on his cheek.

X MAN
(to another bystander)
We ought to beat the hell out of
those paddies.

BYSTANDER
Ain't nobody got the nerve.

X MAN
I got the ner--

An OLD LADY and her HUSBAND stand powerless beside their furniture.

The Large Men carry a hand-full of miscellaneous items down the steps and toss them on the heap.

OLD LADY
Get your hands off my bible!

She reaches for the book in Large's hand.

LARGE
I ain't got your bible, lady.

The Old Lady rips the book from his arms.

OLD LADY
How dare you. You come in here
stomping and jerking up our lives,
but don't you touch my bible.

The Large Men, unfazed, move back into the apartment.

IM
(to X Man)
Who are those men?

X MAN
Marshals.

BYSTANDER
Hell, they ain't nothing but trustees.

IM
And what gives them the right to put
these old folks out on the street?

BYSTANDER
What's the matter with you?

X MAN
Relax, he ain't from around here.

BYSTANDER
They're being evicted!

IM
Don't beat your gums at me. I asked
a civil question.

BYSTANDER
Who do you think you are?

IM
I am who I am. Nevermind that.

IM moves into the Crowd. X MAN holds the Bystander from
going after him.

The Large Men come back down the stairs.

OLD LADY
I'm going in!

LARGE
You're not going anywhere.

OLD LADY
I need to pray.

IM looks over the articles on the curb. He sees an old afghan
throw with the words "GOD BLESS OUR HOME" stitched into it.

LARGE
I can't help it, lady. You'll have
to pray out here.

Large drops more stuff.

IM picks through old newspaper clippings - "MARCUS GARVEY
DEPORTED," a faded photo of Abraham Lincoln, a card that
reads "GRANDMA, I LOVE YOU."

OLD LADY
I'm going in!

LARGE
No you're not.

Large keeps her from ascending the stairs.

OLD LADY
All we want to do is pray. It ain't
right to pray in the street.

LARGE
I'm sorry, lady.

X MAN
Let the woman pray!

IM is surprised when the Man with the 'X' shaped bandage calls out from beside him.

X MAN (CONT'D)
(to IM)
This is ridiculous.

IM stands up.

IM
Let the woman pray.

LARGE
You were legally evicted. You can't go back, see?

OLD LADY
We've been here for twenty years! I just need a few minutes to kneel on the floor. I'm going in!

The Lady scurries up the stairs. Large holds her by the arm and gets in front of her.

LARGE
Lady! I have my orders. And you are not to return. Now get down.

The Lady pauses.

X MAN
Take your hands off her!

The Husband rushes to her side.

HUSBAND
Honey, please.

The Lady tries to twist from Large's grip, and falls down the stairs.

The Crowd erupts.

VOICE (O.S.)
You son of a bitch!

VOICE 2 (O.S.)
Get him! He struck her!

IM and X Man move in. They are shoved to the front by the encroaching Crowd.

IM
 (helping the lady)
 My God. Are you alright?

Large draws a gun.

LARGE
 Stand back or I'll shoot. Stand
 back!

Large moves back into the doorway.

VOICE (O.S.)
 You only got six bullets!

X MAN
 We don't want no bloodshed!

VOICE 2 (O.S.)
 Where you going to hide?

LARGE
 You need to stay out of this!

VOICE (O.S.)
 Let's rush him!

IM bursts up the stairs.

IM
 No, no! Black men, black brothers!
 That's not the way.

IM reaches the top of the stairs. He stands above the crowd.
 All eyes are on him.

Large disappears behind the door. The Crowd quiets.

IM scans the Crowd. He sees X Man at the bottom of the
 stairs.

They wait for IM to speak.

IM (CONT'D)
 Brothers. We are a law-abiding
 people. We cannot anger so quickly.
 We are law abiding!

VOICE (O.S.)
 But we're mad now!

IM
 Yes! We are. But we must be wise.
 Let us learn from the leader whose
 wisdom and action was reported in
 the news the other day.

VOICE (O.S.)

What man?

VOICE 2 (O.S.)

Fuck this guy! Let's get that paddie!

IM

No! We need to organize. We need a leader. Like the man in Alabama who turned in the fugitive legally. After he escaped the mob and ran to his school. Who--

VOICE 2 (O.S.)

So he could be lynched!?

VOICE (O.S.)

Yeah!

The Crowd erupts.

IM

He was a wise leader! Look at him. Look at him!

IM points to the Husband.

IM (CONT'D)

Look at this sweet, elderly couple.

VOICE (O.S.)

It's a damn shame!

IM

It is. And look at their possessions strewn all over the sidewalk in the snow. How old are you, sir?

HUSBAND

I'm eighty-seven years old.

IM

Did you hear? Eighty-seven. And look what he has accumulated. His guts have been tossed in the street like poultry. It is shameful, no doubt. But what are we to do? We turn the other cheek every day. Look at this junk. It's dangerous to be cooped up in a filthy room.

IM holds up broken dishes.

IM (CONT'D)

With shattered dishes and broken chairs. And look at this woman.

(MORE)

IM (CONT'D)

I see her quilts and worn-down shoes,
and I know she's a mother and a
grandmother. But we are law-abiding.
Eighty-seven years, and now it's
garbage in a cyclone. Except your
dog-eared bible. She's let it go to
her head! God is for the heart, not
the head. "Blessed are the pure in
heart." But what about the clear in
head, in eye, the ice-watered vision,
too clear to miss a lie? What are
we trying to do here? These are our
people. Your people. My people.
Your parents' and my parents'. What's
happened here?

VOICE (O.S.)

They been dispossessed, you crazy
son of a bitch!

IM

Dispossessed. That's a good word.
Dispossessed. Who was dispossessed?
They ain't got nothing! Never had
nothing.

Fighting escalates among the Crowd.

IM (CONT'D)

Maybe it's us. We're out here in
the street with them, ain't we? Not
a shack to pray in or an alley to
sing the blues! We don't want the
world, just fifteen minutes of Jesus.
(tilting his head
back to the closed
door)
What do you say, Mr. Law? Do we get
our fifteen minutes?

Large peeks through the crack in the door.

LARGE

I've got my orders.

IM

So, they don't go back.

LARGE

You bet your life.

IM

(to Crowd)
There it is, folks.
(MORE)

IM (CONT'D)

The Law with his blue steel pistol
and his blue serge suit says we're
dispossessed. The Great
Constitutional Dream Book, call it
Secrets of Africa, The Wisdom of
Egypt. Call it The Seeing Eye. But
now it's blind and lost it's luster.
It's all cataracted like a cross-
eyed carpenter, and it don't saw
straight. So where do we go without
a--

VOICE

After that paddie!

The Crowd rushes up the stairs and storms the house. IM is
knocked over.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Get out of the way! He struck that
woman!

X Man pulls IM from the stairs, away from the stampede.
People grab the Old Couple's belongings on the street and
carry them back to the house.

IM

Hide it! Hide the shame!

The raucous of the Crowd turns to cheering. IM and X Man
grab the couch and haul it toward the door.

WOMAN

This feels good!

MAN 1

We should have done this long ago!

IM notices a group of MEN observing the crowd. IM locks
eyes with one. He moves toward IM.

IM

(to X Man)

Who are they?

X Man looks uncomfortable.

X MAN

No one. They're friends.

IM

What do they want?

X MAN

Nothing.

IM looks back, still holding the end of the couch. The other end drops.

X Man is gone.

IM

Hey!

A WHITE MAN with red hair approaches IM.

RED HEAD

Don't worry. We're your friends.

IM

So I hear.

RED HEAD

We're friends with all common people.
We believe in the Brotherhood.

COPS pull up to the scene. Lights blare. They get out with megaphones.

COP

This is an eviction! Back away...

RED HEAD

Come with us.

IM hesitates.

RED HEAD (CONT'D)

Come. I have an offer for you.

IM follows the Red Head into the shadows.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Two identical cars are running. The MEN pile into one, leaving only IM and the Red Head to occupy the other. The Red Head opens the back door and motions for IM to get in.

RED HEAD

Please.

IM climbs in.

INT. DARK CAR - NIGHT

The Red-Hedded Man pours a drink and hands it to IM.

RED HEAD
That was a masterful bit of
persuasion, Brother.

IM
What do you mean?

RED HEAD
I mean I admired your speech. We
all did.

IM
That was no speech.

The Red Head nods and laughs.

RED HEAD
You're well trained. I haven't seen
a crowd aroused so quickly in some
time. You were quite efficient.

IM tries to read the Man's eyes.

RED HEAD (CONT'D)
Where did you learn to speak.

IM
Nowhere.

RED HEAD
Then you're a natural.

IM
A natural at expressing anger,
perhaps.

RED HEAD
Well, it was skillfully controlled.
It was eloquent. Why?

IM
I suppose I felt sorry. I don't
know. I didn't have a plan.

RED HEAD
Please. We all listened very
carefully. You were moved. It wasn't
anger. It was something deeper.

IM
Maybe.

RED HEAD
Maybe those people reminded you of
something. You knew those people,
didn't you?

IM

Maybe I did.

RED HEAD

It was kind of like watching a death, wasn't it?

IM

What are you talking about? No one was killed.

RED HEAD

I'm speaking metaphorically, of course.

(quoting)

"The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she, who thicks man's blood with cold." They're agrarian types, you know. The old folks. Ground up by industry. Cast atop the garbage. You said it well. "Eighty seven years, and now it's garbage in a cyclone." That's nice.

IM

I couldn't help feeling sorry for them.

RED HEAD

Of course. But you shouldn't be wasting your speeches on individuals.

IM

How can you say that?

RED HEAD

I mean the old folks. They're already dead. Defunct. They're lost to religion and incapable of rising to the necessity of this historical situation.

IM

But I care about them. They remind me of people I know back home. They're just like me.

RED HEAD

You're too sentimental, brother. If you were like them, you would never have made that speech. No. You're a different man. History has been born in your brain.

IM

I know why I made that speech.

RED HEAD

Why?

IM

Because I was angry.

RED HEAD

Well, there's no point in arguing about it, is there? But I bet you can do it again. Perhaps you'd like to work for us?

IM

For whom?

RED HEAD

Our organization. The Brotherhood. This district could use your ability in speech. You've already proved that you can move them to action.

IM

I appreciate your time. But I have a job. Tonight, I just felt like making a speech.

RED HEAD

I don't know why you act like such an individualist. You were indignant, and it was because of those people. I can give you the opportunity to make speeches for your people. And after tonight, I think you've made it your duty to work in their interest.

They look at each other.

RED HEAD (CONT'D)

I like that you distrust me. That's good. Why don't you come with me and meet the others?

IM adjusts his tie.

RED HEAD (CONT'D)

It'll be casual. You can meet our Brothers, and if by the end of the night you don't want to join us, you're free to leave.

IM sips his drink.

IM

Okay.

RED HEAD

Good.
 (to Driver)
 To the Chthonian.
 (to IM)
 Call me Brother Jack.

They shake hands.

INT. CHTHONIAN LOUNGE - NIGHT

Large wooden doors with brass handles open.

A fair-skinned WOMAN with jewels and a seductive expression holds the door and greets Brother Jack and IM.

WOMAN
 Welcome, Brother Jack.

She looks IM from head to toe. IM stands tall and tries to ignore her.

The gathering is a mixture of nicely dressed black and white MEN and WOMEN. They dance and mingle.

A JAZZ QUARTET plays Louis Armstrong tunes in the corner.

IM walks through the crowd with Jack. IM stands tall and avoids eye contact with others. He notices a framed portrait of Frederick Douglas hanging on the wall and a marble bust of Cicero resting atop a marble column.

A number of leather divans and armchairs are scattered about the room. The red carpet is vibrant beneath the yellow halogen lights.

IM and Jack approach the bar where an attractive WHITE WOMAN tends.

JACK
 Good evening, Sibyl.

SIBYL
 Evening, Brother Jack. How are we?

JACK
 Wonderful but thirsty.
 (to IM)
 What would you like?

IM
 (too loudly)
 Bourbon.

JACK
(to Sibyl)
Two bourbons.

IM watches Sibyl pour the drinks. Her hair slips from behind her ear and curls in front of her face. Her earring hangs down her neck. He follows her neck down to her breasts.

JACK (CONT'D)
This man pushed history ahead twenty years.

SIBYL
Is that so?

She glances at IM.

JACK
He simply arose from the crowd.

Sibyl hands them their drinks. She leans toward IM.

SIBYL
That's very intriguing.

She slips from the bar top and grabs another glass. She keeps an eye on IM.

SIBYL (CONT'D)
You don't think he should be a little darker?

She smirks. IM hesitates and looks to Jack. Jack laughs.

JACK
It won't matter once he starts speaking.

X Man approaches the bar.

X MAN
(to Sibyl)
Gin please, Sibyl.

IM stands, surprised.

JACK
Ah, yes. This is Brother Tod Clifton.
Brother Clifton, meet our new voice.
Potentially, that is.

IM and CLIFTON lock eyes. Clifton shoots out his hand.

CLIFTON
Nice to meet you.

IM tries to read him.

IM

You too.

Clifton takes his drink and disappears quickly into the crowd.
IM watches him.

SIBYL

Another bourbon?

IM turns back to face Sibyl. She leans over the bar and
exposes cleavage.

IM

Yes.

She slides him a bourbon and smiles.

JACK

Business before pleasure is always a
good rule. Why don't you come with
me into the library. We'll meet the
others.

Jack moves from the bar waving a hand. IM glances at Sibyl,
grabs the drink, and follows. He peeks around for Clifton
as he walks.

Jack slides a bookshelf to the right, which results in a
doorway. IM passes into the library.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Black and white MEN sit, smoke cigars, and talk. Shelves of
books line the walls. A portrait of Booker T. Washington
hangs behind Jack and IM.

JACK

Brothers!

The room quiets.

JACK (CONT'D)

I apologize for interrupting our
gathering with business, but tonight
is a special exception.

A BLACK MAN stands and moves toward IM confidently.

BLACK MAN

Don't be sorry, Brother Jack. We've
been waiting for this for months.

He holds out his hand for IM. IM shakes.

JACK
This is Brother Wrestrum.

WRESTRUM
(to IM)
Nice to meet you. What you did this evening was extraordinary. I think we can all agree.

A few MEN holler in agreement.

JACK
As you know, we are all working here for a better world. For all people. As we witnessed this evening, we are being dispossessed of our heritage. And together, the Brotherhood can do something about it.
(to IM)
What do you think of that?

IM
I think that's just fine.

IM looks around at the Men clapping.

IM (CONT'D)
I think it's excellent.

JACK
So let our Brother's speech remind us why we're here. To once again call us to action. I heard it. I was there.

WRESTRUM
I was there too!

VOICE (O.S.)
Me too!

VOICE 2 (O.S.)
Amazing!

They cheer.

JACK
(to IM)
So I officially invite you into our Brotherhood for the good of all people of this world. What do you say?

Cheering.

JACK (CONT'D)
How would you like to be the new Booker T. Washington?

Jack points to the portrait behind him. IM looks at the portrait and back to the cheering room. He looks at individual faces. He looks into the bourbon swishing in his glass.

IM

I would be honored.

The room erupts.

JACK

Wonderful. We have resurrected a leader today, Brothers! He came out of the anonymity of the crowd and spoke to the people of Harlem. Now let's let him speak again. Well, Brother?

The room quiets.

IM

I don't know what to think right this moment. This is all very new to me. And, somehow, you're convinced you have the right man, I just don't--

WRESTRUM

Don't worry, Brother! You'll rise to the task.

JACK

Yes, we'll lend you guidance and instruction.

IM

When shall I begin?

JACK

Tomorrow. We can waste no time.

(to the room)

Brothers! A new morning has begun! A new sun has risen! Tomorrow, we live in a new era! So, let us push forward with even more passion and vigor. But always remember what we are here for. The mission. We are professionals, here. We are scientists!

The room cheers louder. IM watches in awe. He notices Sibyl listening from the doorway.

JACK (CONT'D)

(to Sibyl)

Sibyl! The slip of paper.

SIBYL
Yes, Brother.

JACK
(to IM)
You'll be given books to read along
with materials that explain our
program in detail.

IM
Thank you.

JACK
Thank you, Brother.

Sibyl returns with a folded piece of paper. She hands it to Jack. Jack slips it to IM with a key.

JACK (CONT'D)
This is your new identity. Your
name and information regarding your
living arrangements. You are to
answer to no other name, you
understand?

IM reads the paper.

IM
Yes, sir.

JACK
I am your Brother now.

IM
Yes, Brother.

JACK
Pretty soon, you'll be known all
over the country.

Jack pulls out his wallet. He hands 300 dollars to IM. IM accepts it, wide-eyed.

JACK (CONT'D)
That should cover any debts and
clothing for now. Your salary will
be sixty dollars a week.

IM holds out the bills.

JACK (CONT'D)
You might want to put that away.

Jack raises his glass.

JACK (CONT'D)
 To the Brotherhood of Man! To
 History! And to Change!

EVERYONE
 To History!

IM finishes his drink and swallows hard.

JACK
 Enjoy your evening, Brothers.

Jack pats IM on the back and departs.

IM sees Clifton standing by the large window in the rear of the room. IM approaches. Clifton looks over the city lights and rushing traffic.

CLIFTON
 It looks awfully pretty, doesn't it?

IM
 It does.

Clifton turns to IM.

CLIFTON
 Well it's good to meet you.

Clifton sticks out his hand again, somewhat mechanically. IM shakes it hesitantly. Clifton pulls IM in close.

CLIFTON (CONT'D)
 Enjoy your evening, Brother.

Clifton departs rapidly. IM opens his hand. In his palm is a broken chain link. IM ponders the link and looks out onto the city.

SIBYL (O.S.)
 Care to dance?

IM turns around in surprise. He slips the link into his pocket.

IM
 Of course.

The Quartet has expanded. They play a Big Band tune. IM and Sibyl laugh and dance closely.

One of the Brothers takes a sword from a holster hanging on the wall and charges through the crowd in celebration. IM smiles in discomfort.

SWORD MAN
 It's a revolution!

Wrestrum chases him down.

WRESTRUM

Let's not get carried away now,
Brother.

The Man returns the sword into the holster. IM and Sibyl finish their drinks.

FADE TO:

EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE CITY STREET - DAY

A yellow tulip stands tall. The handle of a hose is squeezed. Nothing comes out.

MAN (O.S.)

Oh, brother.

The hose drops.

IM walks down the street with a briefcase, duffel bag, and a smile.

IM

(to the Man in the
lawn)

Good morning.

The old MAN IN THE LAWN turns on the spigot. He squints at IM and gives a half-assed wave.

MAN

Yeah, yeah.

IM pulls out the folded piece of paper with his new address on it. He turns the corner, glances at the paper then up at the buildings. He stops in front of an elaborate, apartment-style complex. It is adorned with flowers, and the grass is verdant. He checks the paper, walks to the front door, and enters.

INT. BROTHERHOOD COMPLEX - DAY

IM walks down a long corridor lined with wooden doors. It is silent. He stops in front of door 'E', unlocks, and steps inside.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - DAY

The main area is dimly lit by a single desk lamp. Wooden shelves of books line the walls of the living room. Minimal furniture.

IM peeks in the kitchen. He flicks on a light in a spacious bedroom. IM walks to the oaken Emerson desk in the living room. Neatly stacked on top are a few books and a newspaper. A note rests on top. It reads "FOR OUR 'RABBLE-ROUSER.'"

The headline of the newspaper says "HARLEM EVICTION ERUPTS IN VIOLENCE." IM scans the article. Highlighted is the phrase "sparked by a rabble-rouser..."

IM smiles. He picks up the stack of books and moves to the chair. He reads.

EXT. ARENA - NIGHT

Two dark cars pull up to a backdoor in a narrow alley. The Brothers, all in suits, get out and file through the door.

INT. ARENA CORRIDOR - NIGHT

IM, in the middle of the line, follows the Brothers down a dark corridor. It is dimly lit by halogen bulbs hanging from the ceiling.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The Brothers and IM enter a dark dressing room. It looks more like a locker room.

IM sits on a bench and wipes his forehead. A painting of a child behind a fence hangs on the wall over his shoulder. On the other side of the fence is a large black and white bulldog chained to a tree.

JACK

How do you feel about the material?

IM

Good. I studied all day.

JACK

I suggest you listen carefully to the rest of us. You're going to be our punctuation tonight.

IM nods.

The sound of the audience howling grows. It echoes down the corridor.

Jack adjusts his suit in the mirror. He pulls out a pocket watch.

The audience's cheering is muffled by a blasting song.

JACK (CONT'D)
That's our signal. Let's go,
Brothers.

The Brothers line up behind Jack and file out. IM joins at the rear.

INT. HALLWAY TO STAGE - NIGHT

The sound of music and the howling Crowd grows louder. Two large SECURITY GUARDS escort the Brothers. A light bursts through the end of the corridor. Sweat drips down IM's face. One by one, the Brother's disappear into the light. IM ducks into it. The ambiance pulsates.

INT. ARENA STAGE - NIGHT

The vision of the enormous, stadium Crowd is blurry. IM pauses.

IM follows the Brothers to the right, up the stairs, and onto the stage. The spotlight blinds his vision of the screaming Crowd. IM finds his chair - the last one. The song fades out. The audience quiets.

Jack stands at the microphone. He salutes the Crowd. They cheer, but the cheers quickly fade to silence.

The Brothers sit. IM follows.

JACK
(muffled)
Brothers and sisters! Tonight we
are the dispossessed. We are
gathered...

IM watches Jack's lips move until the sound drones out.

IM's eyes fall to Jack's hands gripping the podium, down to his solid stance, and across the canvas spread out on the stage.

IM gazes into the light over the Crowd. He focuses in on different faces, all of which are fixed on Jack. He shifts his eyes back to the podium.

At the microphone stands a BLACK PREACHER. His arms are raised in song.

IM looks back to the Crowd. They stand and sing. IM turns his head to the seated Brothers. Those in the row clap. The Brother beside IM stands and moves to the podium.

IM's heart beats heavily. It echoes around the stadium.

IM's eyes stare straight ahead. Sweat drips from his forehead.

The Brother returns to his seat and pats IM on the shoulder.

Heartbeats pulse. Deep breaths swirl into the roar of the Crowd.

The spotlight focuses on IM. He stands and walks toward the microphone. It falls in and out of focus. He waits for the Crowd to settle. He clears his throat and takes a deep breath.

IM
(standing too far
from the mic)
Good evening. There are those who
think we are dumb to gather here...

BROTHER
Closer.

IM turns around.

BROTHER (CONT'D)
Move closer.

IM turns back to the microphone.

IM
(too close to the mic)
I apologize, folks. I'm not used to
these shiny microphones. Up until
now, they've kept me away from them.

IM's plosive 'P's' burst into the mic. Jack quickly walks to the podium and pulls the microphone away from IM's mouth.

IM (CONT'D)
Thank you, Brother. Is that better?

The Crowd applauds.

IM (CONT'D)
You see, all I needed was a chance.
(returning to speech)
They think we are dumb to gather
here.

IM relaxes.

IM (CONT'D)

We're the common people. Common. I believe that's a gross mis-statement. They call us dumb, they treat us dumb. They've got what Brother Jack would call a "theory and a practice." Don't give him a chance. Evict him! Dispossess him! That's the word of the night. Dispossess. Dispossess him. Muffle his cymbal. Beat it in stoptime. Make him give a soft-shoe dance. And break him.

A VOICE shouts from the audience.

VOICE (O.S.)

That's a strike!

IM

Yes. They've tried to dispossess us of our manhood. Our womanhood. Our childhood. We're living in the season of dispossession. Except this season lasts all year long. And if we don't resist, they're going to evict us for good. We'll be dispossessed of the very brains in our heads!

The Crowd howls.

IM (CONT'D)

We're not common. We're uncommon. They think we're blind, I say we only have one eye. They've dispossessed us of the other eye the day we were born. We're not blind. We just see in straight, white lines. We're an uncommon sight!

VOICE (O.S.)

Ain't a farmer's wife in the house!

IM

Someone's afraid. Afraid that we might see something.

IM glances at the OFFICERS.

IM (CONT'D)

Well, my blind Brothers. Maybe they're right. Because now, we're like a couple of one-eyed men walking on opposite sides of the street.

(MORE)

IM (CONT'D)

And when someone starts throwing bricks, we're awfully quick to blame each other. But we are mistaken. There is another person between us. And he runs down the middle of that wide, free, gray street throwing stones all day long. He's the one doing the damage.

The Crowd crackles in cheers.

IM (CONT'D)

There's a storm around the corner, Brothers and Sisters. So, let's make a miracle. Let us reclaim our sight, so we can look him in the face.

IM pauses. The Crowd builds into applause. IM searches the Crowd.

IM (CONT'D)

Look at me. Look at me!

The Crowd quiets.

IM (CONT'D)

Times are hard, and I've known despair. I'm from the South, and coming here, I've learned eviction.

Jack shouts from behind.

JACK

Hey!

IM turns. Jack shoots him a warning glare. IM turns back to the microphone.

IM

I must confess. Have I your permission to confess?

A few positive shouts burst through the Crowd. The Brothers stir behind IM. They shift in discomfort.

IM (CONT'D)

Something strange and transforming is taking place in me right now as I stand before you. I feel your eyes upon me. Your black and white eyes. I hear the pulse of your breathing.

IM pauses. Silence.

VOICE (O.S.)

Say it!

IM

I feel that I have just now become human. I feel sharp and clear, and down the dim corridor of history, I hear the footsteps of militant fraternity! I have come home. After a desperate and blind journey, I have discovered my family. My people. My country. We are the citizens of tomorrow's world. And we'll be dispossessed no more!

Thunderous applause. A few PEOPLE run on stage. One of the Brothers pats IM on the back.

BROTHER

Goddamnit. You did it!

IM laughs in relief.

Wrestrum watches as People flock to IM. Jack pushes people back.

JACK

Let's go. They're moving!

The Brothers slide off stage and into the corridor. Jack marches ahead anxiously.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Jack paces in the dim light. The Brothers sit. IM dabs his forehead - proud. The Crowd's cheering nearly shakes the room.

JACK

Anyone?

IM looks at the Brothers' grim faces. Quiet.

JACK (CONT'D)

Okay. Let's have it out right here. Brother Wrestrum. What did you think of the speech?

WRESTRUM

It was backward and reactionary.

JACK

(to another Brother)
What about you?

BROTHER 1
I thought it was quite effective.

JACK
And you, Brother Tobitt?

TOBITT
A mistake.

JACK
Why?

WRESTRUM
Because we must reach the people
through their intelligence.

IM is appalled and flustered.

JACK
It was the antithesis of the
scientific approach!
(to IM)
Tell me, Brother. Is the audience
thinking? Right now.

Jack pauses to emphasize the shouting.

IM
No.

JACK
They're shouting. Your speech was
wild, hysterical, politically
irresponsible, and quite frankly,
dangerous. But above all. It was
incorrect!

IM turns away.

JACK (CONT'D)
A most brilliant example of
theoretical Nijinskys leaping ahead
of history! You better step down,
Brothers, before you land on your
dialectics.

Jack backs up to address the crowd.

JACK (CONT'D)
Listen to them! How are we to know
they aren't against us? Tonight
represents the first step in the
experiment. The release of energy.
Now it's up to you to organize it.

Jack waves his hands for the Brothers to exit. IM remains.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's disgusting, Brother. You've succeeded by instinct where for two years our science has failed.

IM

I'm sorry.

JACK

Don't apologize. It was inevitable. You'll learn. You're wild but effective. Listen. We can't have you giving any more unscientific speeches, do you understand?

IM

Yes.

JACK

Good. Read up.

Jack leaves.

IM reaches into his pocket and pulls out the broken chain link. He closes his eyes.

EXT. IM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

IM drags himself to the front door, exhausted. The overhead light flickers on and off.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

IM slides through the silence to his door. He opens it.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

IM opens the door and tosses his belongings on the floor.

SIBYL (O.S.)

Good evening, Brother.

IM jolts in terror.

Sibyl sits at IM's leather desk chair in a red hostess gown.

IM

What are you doing here?

SIBYL

You have a beautiful room.

Sibyl swivels in the chair and stands. She moves sensually to IM.

SIBYL (CONT'D)
I just wanted to congratulate you on your performance tonight.

IM
Congratulate me? For what, disappointing the Brothers?

SIBYL
You didn't disappoint them. Brother Jack was rough on you, I see.

Sibyl fingers his jacket.

SIBYL (CONT'D)
You weren't scientific enough. I assure you, you are exactly what the Brotherhood needs.

IM
Why are you saying this?

SIBYL
Brother Jack is afraid of you. He knows what you can do.

IM backs away from Sibyl.

SIBYL (CONT'D)
I brought you a present. Come see.

Sibyl walks into the bedroom. IM follows reluctantly.

BEDROOM

Sibyl presents a large painting that hangs over his bed.

SIBYL (CONT'D)
It's a Renoir. Isn't it beautiful?

IM looks at the painting of a young, nude woman.

IM
Yes it is.

SIBYL
I'm glad it pleases you. Hubert never found time to enjoy it.

IM
Hubert?

SIBYL

My husband. He's always dashing off
on business.

IM loosens his tie and walks to the kitchen.

KITCHEN

IM

Why are you really here? You can
tell me.

Sibyl stands in the doorway.

SIBYL

I want to make sure you're
comfortable. I know how Brother
Jack can be. Especially on the new
members.

IM

Well, I'm perfectly fine. Thank
you.

SIBYL

I'm interested in the spiritual values
of the Brotherhood. I don't believe
there is any good in economic security
and leisure if there is no spiritual
or emotional security. You
understand?

She moves in close to IM.

SIBYL (CONT'D)

Can you pour me a drink?

IM

I'm sorry I don't have anything.

SIBYL

I brought wine.

A bottle rests on the counter. IM pours a glass for both of
them.

IM

So you listened to the speeches
tonight?

SIBYL

Of course.

IM

And what did you think?

SIBYL

You were thrilling. You convey the great, throbbing vitality of the movement.

IM

You think so?

IM moves out of the kitchen. Sibyl continues to the bedroom.

BEDROOM

SIBYL

Yes. You have the ability to instill fear in your audience.

IM

Fear?

SIBYL

Your speeches are so powerful. And primitive. You have tom-toms beating in your voice!

IM

My God. I assumed that was the beat of my profound ideas.

Sibyl lays down on the bed. She sips her wine. IM's gaze climbs up her exposed leg.

SIBYL

There is so much naked power in your words. You capture one's emotions and intellect at the same time.

IM

Well, the emotion is there. But it's the scientific approach I'm missing.

IM sits on the bed.

IM (CONT'D)

That's what releases it. As Brother Jack says, we are organizers.

Pause.

IM (CONT'D)

I'm like this wine. Good at releasing emotion but dreadful at organizing it.

IM looks back at Sibyl. She is naked. The gown is in a pile on the floor.

IM stands. The phone rings. Sibyl takes his hand.

SIBYL

Come.

IM

I should get the phone.

SIBYL

Nevermind it. Come.

She pulls IM onto the bed. They kiss long and sensually. The dim lights buzz.

IM

Your husband.

SIBYL

Chicago.

IM

But--

SIBYL

Brother...

The phone rings again. Sibyl gets up and walks slowly over to it.

IM stares at her body. Her black hair streams over her shoulders. IM sits up on the large white bed. He watches Sibyl in the vanity mirror. He looks at his reflection between her body and the cracked bedroom door.

Sibyl bends over and pulls the plug on the ivory phone. She walks back and sits in IM's lap. She unbuttons his shirt. They fall back onto the bed, knocking a glass of wine from the nightstand. The wine sprays across the floor.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. MEETING HALL - DAY

Brothers sit around a large, rectangular meeting table in a hall with a high, Gothic ceiling.

IM walks in with a briefcase.

JACK

Brother Jack.

IM avoids eye contact.

JACK (CONT'D)
Just in time.

IM slides quickly into an empty chair.

JACK (CONT'D)
Are we all present?

WRESTRUM
Except Brother Clifton.

JACK
Of course. Well, let's begin. I
don't have much time.

Brothers click their pens and flip through pages. Jack stands up.

JACK (CONT'D)
You are all aware of the recent events
and our new Brother, of course. We
must achieve two things and waste no
time doing so. Number one. We must
increase the effectiveness of our
agitation. And two. We must organize
the energy already released. That
means increase membership. If we
fail to lead our people into action
soon, they'll become passive and
cynical. So we must strike
immediately and strike hard.

The Brothers applaud lightly. IM looks down, hands folded.

JACK (CONT'D)
And it is for this purpose our new
Brother is going to be district
spokesman.

IM looks up in surprise. Brothers applaud.

JACK (CONT'D)
How do you feel about that, Brother?

IM
I wasn't expecting to--

JACK
You'll do fine. Just do what you
did at the eviction, and get people
moving.

IM
I'll do my best.

The door opens. Brothers are silent.

Clifton enters and stands by the window.

JACK
Clifton.

CLIFTON
Yes, Brother.

JACK
Why is our leader of the youth late?

CLIFTON
I had a bit of an encounter this morning.

JACK
With the Nationalists.

Clifton turns to face the window.

JACK (CONT'D)
(to IM)
Brother, you have heard of Ras, I presume?

IM
I'm afraid I haven't.

JACK
He is the wild man who refers to himself as a black Nationalist.

IM
I apologize. I'll research him as soon as I get--

JACK
No need. I have a feeling you'll hear about him soon enough.

IM
Are we still to fight evictions?

JACK
It seems you've made it a leading issue, haven't you?

IM
Then we need to step up the fight, correct?

JACK
What do you suggest? Most of the leaders are against us.

IM

But I bet we can get them to support the issue whether they like us or not.

Jack studies IM. Clifton speaks without turning around.

CLIFTON

He's got something there. It's a non-partisan community issue.

IM

Exactly. Even if they are against us, they can't afford to oppose the interests of the community.

CLIFTON

We have them across a barrel.

Wrestrum dips his head.

JACK

We have always taken precautions to avoid these leaders--

IM

Brother. When I first arrived in Harlem, one of the first things to impress me was a man making a speech from atop a ladder. Although he spoke with an accent, he spoke violently and passionately, and stirred his audience with enthusiasm.

Jack laughs.

JACK

So, you have met him.

IM

That was Ras?

JACK

Ras the Exhorter. But you're right. He is a very effective tactician.

Jack studies IM.

CLIFTON

Ras won't bother us.

WRESTRUM

What makes you so sure?

CLIFTON

Because he won't have a choice.

Clifton and Wrestrum trade glares.

JACK
Very well, then. But keep in mind
that the Brotherhood is strictly
against violence, terror, and
provocation.

IM
I understand.

JACK
Clifton?

CLIFTON
Yes, Brother.

IM looks to Clifton who peeks over his shoulder at IM.

JACK
You two can divide the labor.

Jack packs up his briefcase.

JACK (CONT'D)
I'll have a list of community leaders
for you in the morning.

The Brothers leave except for IM and Clifton. IM walks over
to Clifton. Clifton turns from the window.

IM
So, you think we can do this?

CLIFTON
Sure. If you want it.

IM
I do.

CLIFTON
Then it'll go big. Bigger than
anything since Garvey, I suspect.

IM
I never saw Garvey.

CLIFTON
Me neither. But Harlem sure did.
He made them move. Our people are
hell to move. But we have a
scientific plan, right?

Clifton walks out of the window light.

IM
Yes.

CLIFTON
Well. I think they're ready to move.
Things are bad enough, they'll listen.

IM
I hope you're right.

Clifton turns to leave.

CLIFTON
I'll see you tonight.

IM
Brother.

Clifton stops. IM removes the broken chain link from his pocket.

IM (CONT'D)
Why did you give me this?

Clifton looks at the link in IM's hand.

CLIFTON
It was my grandfather's. He was
lucky.

Clifton exits. IM looks at the the break in the twisted metal.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

IM reads and scribbles notes at his desk.

Clifton bursts through the door.

CLIFTON
Brother! It's Ras.

IM jumps up. He folds his notes and places them in his pocket.

IM
Time to organize.

They leave in a hurry.

EXT. HARLEM STREET - NIGHT

A CROWD of boys and men scream and shout. They shove each other.

IM and Clifton swim through the Crowd and look for signs of RAS.

CLIFTON
Start talking. Keep them occupied.

IM jumps up on the base of a streetlight.

IM
Brothers! BROTHERS!

Some of them turn to listen.

CLIFTON
There he is!

Clifton points behind the Crowd. IM can only see a bright light.

IM
My Brothers! The time has come for
action! Peaceful action!

The Crowd reignites and swarms around IM's streetlight.

IM (CONT'D)
We must organize!

IM loses Clifton in the Crowd. The streetlight is smashed out. IM is showered in glass. Blood streaks his face. He is knocked from the base of the streetlight.

IM barrels through the Crowd. Sounds of smashing windows. Neon lights in the Corner Store flicker out.

IM catches a blow in the stomach. He counters.

COPS
Break it up. Break it up!

IM continues toward the Corner Store. Bottles fly.

IM sees RAS standing in the shattered glass of the Corner Store. He is large and dressed in elaborate military garb. Across from Ras stands Clifton. IM notices a glimmer in Ras' hand. Ras and Clifton trade punches.

IM fights off a couple of Men and makes his way to the Corner Store.

CORNER STORE

Clifton is on the ground among shattered glass. Ras holds Clifton by the collar with a knife to his throat. Ras speaks with a Jamaican accent.

RAS
I ought to kill you, goddamnit. But
you're black. Why are you black? No
man strikes the Exhorter!

IM waits in the shadows.

RAS (CONT'D)
You're my brother! Why are you with
the whites? Why? That's shit.
We're the same color. You're black,
goddamnit.

Clifton struggles in Ras' grasp.

CLIFTON
Shut up!

RAS
You're African!

Ras shakes Clifton. Clifton wails and hits Ras in the side.

SOMEONE hits the storefront glass with a pipe. Neon signs
blink.

RAS (CONT'D)
Why do you fight against us?

Ras cries in passion.

RAS (CONT'D)
They give you money? Their money
bleeds black! That's your blood.
That's my blood!

Clifton shakes loose and scrambles to his feet.

IM enters the store. Blinking neon lights refract off the
crystals of glass. One window pane is missing completely.

IM
Come, Brother. The man's crazy.

Bottles fly in the street. Ras moves toward IM.

RAS
Me crazy? We're three black men
fighting in the street because of
your white man. That's not crazy?
Is that your scientific understanding?

IM
Let's go, Brother.

Clifton stands still.

RAS

(to IM)

Yes. You go. He stays. This man could be a king in Africa. A black king. You've contaminated him.

Ras turns the knife on IM.

IM

Let's be sensible

RAS

What, you think I'm ignorant?

CLIFTON

Yes.

Ras turns back to Clifton.

RAS

Because I speak bad English? I'm African! Like you.

Clifton lunges at Ras. They wrestle to the floor.

RAS (CONT'D)

What have they done to you, black man? They buy you? Give you a pat on the back and a piece of cunt? They buy you cheap, man. Is that freedom?

IM grabs Clifton's arm and tears him from Ras.

RAS (CONT'D)

He got you so you don't trust your black intelligence. Recognize your duty and join us.

A helicopter hovers overhead. It shines an bright, sweeping light.

Ras sits up. He sweats and heaves. He puts the knife away.

Blood rolls down IM's face. Blood trickles behind Clifton's ears.

IM

Look. We don't want trouble from you. We're going to be out here every night. And we're going to be prepared. And we will refuse to run--

RAS

Goddamn it, man! This is Harlem. This is my territory!

IM

It's your turn to listen to me.
We'll be out here every night. And
if you come after our Brothers again,
black or white, we won't forget it.

RAS

And I won't forget you.

IM

Good. You're outnumbered, Ras.
Just remember that. We're all
fighting for a Brotherly world.

RAS

They're not your Brothers. They're
white! Use your head.

IM

Come on, Brother.

RAS

You must be sleeping.

Clifton shoves Ras against the wall.

RAS (CONT'D)

You're nowhere, man!

IM and Clifton walk out over the glass and into the street.

EXT. HARLEM STREET - NIGHT

IM and Clifton hurry through the Crowd. Search lights stream
from the sky. Police drag away the violent Looters.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - DAY

IM leans back in his chair. He rubs his forehead. Tired
shadows are under his eyes.

A sound comes from his front door. IM walks over and opens
it. He picks up a newspaper and a blank envelope. He moves
back to his desk. The newspaper has a picture of the night's
riot, and the headline reads, "HARLEM MOVED OVER EVICTIONS."

IM opens the envelope. The title of the document is
"COMMUNITY LEADERS." There is a list of names and phone
numbers. IM consults the news article. He scans the text.
He places the Community Leaders on his desk and pulls over
the phone. He dials.

IM

Good morning, Doctor Douglass. I am calling on behalf of the Harlem district. I'm sure you are aware of the eviction issue which has recently taken hold.

(pause)

Yes. And being a valued member of our community, I wanted to invite you to join our rally tomorrow evening...

FADE TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS:

IM addresses the Brothers in the Meeting Hall.

IM talks on the phone.

IM walks from store to store.

IM writes.

IM on the phone.

IM gathers mail.

IM staples advertisements for Eviction Rallies on phone poles.

IM stands atop a ladder speaking to a medium-sized crowd.

IM (CONT'D)

Brothers and Sisters! This is the first step in seeking our vision of Brotherhood...

Newspaper reads "HARLEM HAS A VOICE"

IM writes. The newspaper heading is cut out and hangs above his desk.

IM on the phone, laughing.

IM gathers more mail.

IM hands out pins and buttons with a Brotherhood logo.

IM giving a speech to a larger audience.

IM on the phone.

IM (CONT'D)

...And you're affiliated with what magazine? Sure I'll write something up...

IM leads a Crowd through the Harlem streets bearing Brotherhood flags and signs.

Newspaper reads "HARLEM MOVES TO CITY HALL" with a photo of IM in front of the march.

IM sits in a studio across from a JOURNALIST. He smiles and shakes her hand.

IM on the phone.

IM (CONT'D)
...That's very flattering.
Unfortunately I'm too busy for an
interview. You might try our youth
leader, Brother Tod Clifton.
(pause)
Tod Clifton. Yes...

IM writes. Papers are stacked on his desk.

IM pulls mail from his box and flips through them. He stops on an unmarked letter.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - DAY

IM reads the letter at his desk. It says, "TAKE A FRIEND'S ADVICE AND DON'T MOVE TOO FAST. THIS IS A WHITE MAN'S WORLD." IM tears the letter. He scribbles a few notes. The phone rings. IM drops his pen and picks up the phone.

JACK (V.O.)
You better get to headquarters.

INT. MEETING HALL - NIGHT

There is one empty chair around the large table. Jack addresses the Brothers. IM sits in anticipation.

JACK
As some of you may have noticed.
Brother Clifton has disappeared.

IM is the only one surprised.

IM
What?

JACK
I said Clifton is gone.

IM looks at the empty seat.

JACK (CONT'D)

He hasn't been seen in over three weeks. Although longer than usual, it wouldn't be much of a surprise if it weren't for Brother Tobitt, who was the last to see him.

Brother TOBITT has a bandage on his face and a bruised eye.

JACK (CONT'D)

Brother Tobitt claims to have been beaten by Clifton before he fled.

Tobitt looks down ashamedly.

IM

No. There must be some mistake. Brother Clifton wouldn't do that. I know him and--

JACK

Yes. We know. So do you have something you need to tell us, Brother?

IM is flustered and angry.

IM

I haven't spoken to Brother Clifton in nearly a month, but I do know that he would never betray the Brotherhood.

JACK

Then where is he?

IM

I don't know.

JACK

I hate to admit it, Brother. But the truth is there are those among us who don't really believe in the Brotherhood.

IM

I haven't encountered any of that.

JACK

Then this must be a serious misunderstanding.

IM

I assure you it is.

JACK
Brother, this is difficult because I
think we can all agree that your
work has been splendid--

IM
What are you accusing me of, if I
may ask?

Jack tosses the chain link on the table.

JACK
What is that?

IM reaches into his empty pocket.

IM
That was a personal present. What
is this about?

JACK
Why do you have it?

IM thinks.

IM
It reminds me what we're fighting
against.

JACK
No, no, no. That is exactly what we
don't want. It is our goal to remind
everyone of what we have in common.
That we are all Brothers.

Jack picks up the link and tosses it to IM.

JACK (CONT'D)
I suggest you get rid of it.

IM pockets the link.

JACK (CONT'D)
Brother Wrestrum. You wanted to
bring up an issue.

Wrestrum stands and removes a magazine article with IM's
face.

IM
What is that from?

WRESTRUM
Don't act like you haven't seen it.

IM
I haven't.

IM scans it.

IM (CONT'D)
What's wrong with it?

WRESTRUM
What does this say about us, Brothers?

Wrestrum holds up the image.

WRESTRUM (CONT'D)
I'll tell you. Nothing. It's all about him. What he thinks. What he does. What he's going to do. Look at it.

JACK
Is this true?

IM
I haven't read it. I can't keep track of all the interviews I've been asked to do, but I--

WRESTRUM
Hell, it's right here in black and white! He's nothing but a selfish opportunist.

The room is silent. IM fumes.

WRESTRUM (CONT'D)
He wants people to believe he is the Brotherhood. He's got some kind of plot!

IM
That's enough. I won't take any more slander. I've always adhered to the principles of the Brotherhood in all of my work. You can read whatever you like.

WRESTRUM
He is a petty individualist with his own plan.

IM
That is a lie. I have no plan other than the instructions layed out by the Brotherhood.

WRESTRUM
Then why, when you were in Philadelphia last week, did no one show up to our rally? Explain that.
(MORE)

WRESTRUM (CONT'D)

He's training people to listen to no one but him. That's why.

The Brothers erupt in argument.

JACK

Brothers!

(to IM)

What do you know about this article?
What information did you give the
reporter?

IM

I have given nothing but our official
literature. I have told no one what
to ask or what to write--

WRESTRUM

Brothers, all you have to do is listen
to the people of Harlem. They only
speak of him. Never about the work
of the rest of us. This man wants
to be a dictator and ought to be
thrown out!

The room falls silent. IM bursts to his feet.

IM

That is a contemptible lie! You are
criminally mistaken and no Brother
of mine!

JACK

That's an awfully serious charge,
Brother Wrestrum. This was not
intended to be a trial. Only a
questioning.

IM

Well I'm not going to stand here and
take this any longer. Read whatever
you like. You know the work I have
done. And I stand by Brother Clifton.
He'll return and resolve his absence.
Now if you're finished with this
childish jamboree, I'd like to return
to my work.

JACK

That's fine, Brother.

IM

Good.

IM grabs his briefcase and turns to leave.

JACK
Just one more thing.

IM halts.

JACK (CONT'D)
I noticed that Sibyl's love for Renoir
has rubbed off on you.

IM's eyes catch fire.

JACK (CONT'D)
I don't know what you're up to,
Brother. Maybe nothing. Maybe this
is a misunderstanding. But I suggest
you tread lightly. And you say
Clifton will return. Let's hope so.
Because as of now, he is effectively
terminated from the Brotherhood.
So, until he returns or until you
decide to speak up, you'll remain
inactive in Harlem.

IM moves closer to Jack.

IM
You mean I can no longer work?

JACK
I'm afraid not. Not until this is
resolved.

IM turns his back on Jack and exits the meeting.

Jack looks challengingly at Wrestrum and the rest of the
Brothers who avoid eye contact.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

IM twists the dial on his phone. It rings. No answer. IM
hangs up. The ivory phone glows in the darkness.

FADE OUT:

INT. SHOE STORE - DAY

IM slips his foot into a new, beige shoe.

OWNER (O.S.)
How does it feel?

IM
Better.

IM looks at the OWNER.

OWNER

Wonderful. I'll ring you up at...

The Owner recognizes IM's face under the brim of his hat.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Consider it a gift for your work,
Sir.

IM

Thank you.

EXT. MIDTOWN CITY STREET - DAY

IM exits the shoe store and tilts his hat over his eyes. He waits at a crosswalk.

A MAN WITH A FRUIT CART waits beside him and stares. IM ignores him. The Man watches IM cross the street.

IM walks swiftly through the busy streets, keeping his head down. The voice of a STREET SALESMAN is heard.

SALESMAN

(half-rapping)

Shake it up. Shake it up! He's
Sambo. The dancing doll. Ladies
and gentlemen.

The voice grows nearer. IM keeps his head down.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

Stretch him by the neck, and put him
to the test. Shake him up, set him
down, and watch him do the rest!

IM catches a glimpse of the doll ahead on the side of the street. He approaches, keeping an eye on the dancing doll.

A crowd of PEOPLE form a semi-circle around the doll. IM stands behind them, and stares in awe at the doll.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

He'll make you laugh. He'll make
you sigh. He'll make you want to
dance and dance! He's Sambo! Buy
one for your baby and maybe, just
maybe, she'll love you forever, baby!

The doll is cheaply made with orange and black tissue paper with a cardboard circle for a head. It smiles, bounces, twists, flips and flops like a puppet.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)
Shake him, shake him. You can't
break him. The dancing, prancing,
entrancing Sambo! Twenty-five cents,
ladies and gentlemen.

IM watches a few People buy the doll. The doll slumps over
then pops back up and dances again. IM moves closer.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)
He'll kill your depression, your
dispossession.

IM's eyes shoot to the Salesman. It is Clifton wearing
sunglasses and without his trademark bandage.

IM's eyes open wide. Clifton looks at IM, deliberately
unseeing.

CLIFTON
Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

A loud whistle.

A LOOKOUT BOY on the corner whistles and waves.

COPS are on foot.

IM looks back to Clifton. Clifton quickly sweeps the dolls
and money into a box.

CLIFTON (CONT'D)
Ladies and gentlemen, if you'll just
follow Sambo around the corner...

Clifton and the Lookout Boy walk briskly around the corner
with the box.

IM's eyes fall to a dropped doll on the sidewalk. He moves
in and picks it up. Cops walk by quickly.

IM stares at the pathetic features of the doll. Hollering
comes from around the corner. IM pockets the doll and walks
in the direction of Clifton and the Cops.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

IM spots Clifton running by himself across the lanes of
traffic. The Cops are close behind. People in cars slam on
their brakes and honk. IM jogs after him.

The Cops shout at Clifton. A Cop catches up on the sidewalk
and shoves Clifton from behind. Clifton falls. The box of
dolls flies onto the sidewalk.

IM hustles across the street to the scene.

Clifton stands and uppercuts the Cop. The Cop knocks Clifton to his knees. Clifton stares into the Cop's eyes.

A Car passes in front of IM. IM makes it to the curb.

A dark substance grows on Clifton's shirt over his stomach. IM stares in disbelief and puts one foot up on the curb.

The Cop waves IM away with his gun.

COP

Stay back.

IM

He's a friend. I just want to help.

COP

He don't need any help.

IM looks back at Clifton. Clifton lies on his stomach. A pool of blood gathers on the sidewalk. IM's vision blurs.

COP (CONT'D)

(to IM)

Look. I've had enough trouble. Get back across that street.

The Other Cop kneels down to examine Clifton.

IM

I'm his friend.

COP

Not anymore, Mac.

The Other Cop stands. He backs up the Crowd.

IM stays in front. He watches the pool of blood curl toward the scattered box of dolls. The Cop pushes Clifton's body aside and slides the box next to him. IM drops his head and turns away.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

IM stares through the rails, eyes steady. The rails begin to shake. A Rat crawls quickly along the rails and darts into a hole. The train arrives. IM steps on.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - DAY

IM stares into space. Images through the window blur across his vision.

IM notices a white NUN, wearing black, sitting in his train. She holds her prayer beads with closed eyes. Across from this Nun is a BLACK NUN who wears white. She too holds her prayer beads with closed eyes.

IM (V.O.)
 Sometimes when my mind wanders, I
 begin to think. Do we exist to bury
 others or to be entombed? To give
 life or to receive it? Do we see
 each other, think about each other,
 even those of us who speak? And
 when we do speak, would the impatient
 businessmen in conventional suits
 and tired housewives with their
 plunder, understand? What would
 they say?

A group of young BLACK BOYS stands in the rear of the train. They laugh and joke and look at themselves in their reflections. One Boy adjusts his hat.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

IM walks up the Subway stairs and onto the sidewalk.

YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN dressed in bright colors and dark stockings pass him periodically. Some wear exotic hats and sunglasses.

IM (V.O.)
 For the boys speak a jived-up
 transitional language full of country
 glamour, think transitional thoughts,
 though perhaps they dream the same
 old ancient dreams. They were men
 out of time. Men out of time who
 would soon be gone and forgotten.
 But who knew...

Two BOYS, dressed in black clothing, run from a corner convenience store with handfuls of candy bars. They run toward IM, dropping some candy. IM continues walking forward and watches them as they pass.

An OLD LADY, behind IM, sticks out her leg and trips one. A nearby POLICEMAN jogs over. IM continues to walk.

IM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Who knew but that they were saviors,
the true leaders, the bearers of
something precious? The stewards of
something uncomfortable, burdensome,
which they hated because living
outside the realm of history, there
was no one to applaud their value.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - DAY

IM sits at his desk in dim lighting. The Sambo doll slouches on his desk. He stares at it. He stares at the thin, black strings used to control it.

IM looks at the ivory phone. He picks it up and dials. He speaks solemnly. He hangs up.

He pulls out a few sheets of blank paper. He writes,
"SOMETIMES WHEN MY MIND WANDERS..."

IM (V.O.)

But what if history was a gambler
instead of a force in a laboratory
experiment? And the boys his ace in
the hole? What if history was not a
reasonable citizen, but a madman
full of paranoid guile and these
boys his agents? His own revenge?
For they were outside in the dark
with dancing dolls and our fallen
brother. Running and dodging the
forces of history instead of making
a stand.

EXT. HARLEM STREETS - DAY

A MARCHING BAND leads the funeral procession through the streets. Behind the band is a gray casket, lifted high. Behind the casket is IM followed by a large Crowd.

STORE OWNERS and PASSERSBY stop to watch. Some join the procession. SOMEONE holds a sign up that reads, "OUR HOPE SHOT DOWN."

The Crowd accumulates as it moves. The casket seems to float atop the people marching.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

The gray casket is propped up for all to see. A flag drapes over it.

A large Crowd of black and white people dressed in black and white surrounds the casket.

IM stands at the podium. Two blackbirds sweep across the scene and into the sky.

IM reads from his papers. He finishes the line, "RUNNING AND DODGING THE FORCES OF HISTORY INSTEAD OF MAKING A STAND." He looks up at the Crowd. Some People cry, some look solemn, Some are merely listening. IM crumples the remainder of his speech.

IM
You know what? You should all go home.

The Crowd shuffles.

IM (CONT'D)
Go home and forget him.

IM starts to leave the podium. The Crowd remains, watching.

IM (CONT'D)
For some reason we're all here now. Standing here where we hadn't been standing before. What are you waiting for? For me to explain in twenty minutes what was building for twenty years and ended in twenty seconds?

The Crowd listens.

IM (CONT'D)
Fine. I'll tell you.

A WOMAN bursts into tears.

IM (CONT'D)
His name was Clifton, and they shot him down. His name was Clifton, he was tall and handsome. His face was black, his hair was thick. His name was Clifton, and now he's dead. Uninterested. And it doesn't matter. His lips were thick, his eyes were sharp, his hands were quick, and he had a heart. His name was Clifton. Tod Clifton. And he was born, had a few hopes, fell and died. There. You've heard it all.

The Crowd stirs in discomfort.

IM (CONT'D)

You want more?

Silence.

IM (CONT'D)

Very well. His name was Clifton. He was young, a leader, and when he fell there was a hole in his sock. His name was Clifton, and he was black, and they shot him. I know it because I saw it. He fell, and he kneeled. He kneeled, and he bled. He bled, and he died. His blood was red and wet. It reflected the buildings, the sky, the birds, and the trees. And it dried in the sun. That's the story, and that's how it ended. You tired of such stories? Then go home. Sick of the blood? Go home out of the sun where the beer is cold and the saxophones are mellow. Where you can listen to plenty of good beauty parlor laughing lies and sermons that fill the cool of the evening. Go home and forget it, because there has never been a story so short and simple.

The Crowd remains. They listen for more.

IM (CONT'D)

Listen to me standing on this mountain! His name was Tod Clifton, and he was full of illusions. He thought he was a man when he was only Tod Clifton. A mistake of which we're all guilty. He thought he was a man. But it was hot downtown, and he forgot. He forgot his time and place. He forgot history. And there was a cop. A good citizen. But this cop had an itching finger and an eager ear for a word that rhymed with 'trigger,' and when Clifton fell, he found it. Then blood ran like blood in a comic book.

A WOMAN covers her mouth, sobbing. A MAN looks down.

IM (CONT'D)

Now Tod Clifton is dead. One with the ages under this veiled sun.

(MORE)

IM (CONT'D)

Died of wounds received from three bullets, fired at three paces. One entering the right ventricle of the heart. Another severing the spinal ganglia, traveling downward to lodge in the pelvis. The other breaking through the back. Now he's in this box with the bolts tightened down. And we're in there with him. It's dark and cracked and clogged and crowded. So we need to get out now. If we could hear Clifton, he'd say "Get out of the box. Get out and tell the cops that when they call you 'nigger' to make a rhyme with 'trigger,' it makes the gun backfire." So in a few hours, when Clifton is nothing but cold bones in the ground, you and I will be there with him. Now go home and forget him. His name was Tod Clifton. He aroused our hopes, and he died.

IM leaves the podium and walks coldly through the Crowd.

A SINGER takes the podium and sings "There's Many a Thousand Gone" a cappella in a husky baritone.

GRAVEDIGGERS lower the casket into the ground.

MEN and WOMEN begin to turn away from the scene.

IM sits in the back seat of a black car. It pulls away.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

IM ambles down the street.

A group of KIDS on big-wheeled tricycles races down the street. One carries the bent sign that reads, "OUR HOPE SHOT DOWN." They laugh and chase each other. IM watches.

IM approaches a large stone building with a maroon awning that reads, "The Chthonian." He enters.

INT. MEETING HALL - DAY

IM enters a silent Meeting Hall. Jack stands up. The rest of the Brothers sit on the same side of the table. IM walks to the empty side.

JACK
Well. How'd it go?

IM
They were moved.

WRESTRUM
In what direction?

IM sits.

JACK
That's all you have to say? After I told you to--

IM
It was my personal responsibility.

JACK
Your personal responsibility.

Jack laughs in anger.

IM
Yes. I tried to win back our following, and I'm quite certain I succeeded. It's too bad you missed it.

JACK
Clifton was not a hero!

IM stands up.

IM
He was an unarmed Brother, and he was killed!

TOBITT
Have you read the newspapers?

IM
I was there!

JACK
And you decided to organize that side show on account of your per--

IM
Personal responsibility. Yes.

JACK
Under your personal responsibility, your leadership, a traitorous merchant of vile instruments of anti-Negro, anti-minority, racist bigotry has
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
received the funeral of a hero. You
realize that? He was a traitor!

IM
And what is a traitor, Brother? He
was a man. He was a Negro. He was
a Brother. He was alive, and now
he's dead. He's jammed full of
contradictions. So full, half of
Harlem came out and stood in the sun
to answer our call.

JACK
How can you defend him? A peddler
of obscene dolls!

Jack throws a Dancing Doll at IM.

JACK (CONT'D)
I must be an idiot to have given you
a chance.

IM
These dolls are nothing.

Wrestrum and Tobitt huff in resentment.

IM (CONT'D)
All you see in Clifton's death is
the harm in the prestige of the
Brotherhood. Well the Brotherhood
isn't the Negro people!

IM leans closer to Jack.

IM (CONT'D)
What have you contributed, Brother?
A career in the Burlesque? Your
profound knowledge of Negroes? Are
you from a plantation-owning family?
Does your mammy--

JACK
I'll have you know I am married to a
fine, intelligent Negro girl!

IM leans back in realization.

IM
Brother. I apologize. I misjudged
you. I didn't realize you're
practically a Negro yourself! Was
it by immersion or injection?

JACK
You son of a bitch!

Jack reaches across the table. IM pushes his arms away and holds Jack by the collar. The other Brothers stand, unsure what to do.

IM

Clifton was shot because he was black and he resisted. Not because of his ideas. He could have been selling matzos or bibles. If he had been white, he'd be alive!

Wrestrum pulls Jack away from IM.

WRESTRUM

Black and white. White and black. This is racist nonsense! I won't listen anymore.

IM

You don't have to, Brother! Go get your information straight from the mulatto source.

Clifton lunges. Jack holds him back.

IM (CONT'D)

That crowd turned out today not because Clifton was part of the Brotherhood. It was because I gave them the opportunity to affirm themselves!

JACK

You have become quite a theoretician. It's astounding.

IM

Nothing like isolating a man to make him think.

JACK

You were not hired to think. You were hired to talk!

IM

And if I wish to express an idea?

JACK

We only furnish correct ideas for correct occasions.

IM

And what if you're wrong.

JACK

Then you keep quiet!

IM

When my people demand I speak?

JACK

The committee answers! We handle theories and business of strategy. We're experienced!

IM

You don't know anything about the political consciousness of Harlem. I do. I'm describing a reality I know about!

WRESTRUM

That is the most questionable statement of all.

IM

Your source tells you differently? History's made at night, eh Brother? I suggest you get around more. All of you. You might learn that today was the first time in weeks they have actually listened.

(to Jack)

Ask your girl to take you around to the gin mills and the barber shops. The juke joints and the churches. And the beauty parlors on Sundays. A whole unrecorded history is spoken then. Put her out on the corner, and have her tell you what goes down. People are angry because you've failed.

JACK

I've had enough of this.

IM

The Brotherhood has betrayed them!

JACK

You're a liar.

IM

Don't call me that. I'm telling you what they think.

JACK

Our job is to tell them what to think!

IM

Then tell them yourself.

IM starts to walk out. Jack grabs him.

IM (CONT'D)
Who do you think you are?

JACK
I'm their leader. I'm your leader.

IM
Are you sure you're not their great
white father? Huh?

IM and Jack wrestle. IM pushes Jack into the table. Chairs scatter. The Brothers surround.

IM (CONT'D)
Wouldn't it be better if they called
you Marse Jack? Wouldn't it--

Jack shoves back. They fight. Jack pushes IM into a wall. IM wraps his hands around Jack's throat. IM pushes Jack onto the table. Jack falls on his back and hits his head.

Something projects from his face.

IM looks to the glass of water on the table. He strangles Jack.

A glass eye spins in the water.

IM looks back to Jack. His left eye socket is empty. IM eases his grasp on Jack.

JACK
Either you accept discipline or get
out.

IM stares back to the eye in the glass. Light from the window refracts through the glass. The eye expands in the illusion of the glass's curve.

JACK (CONT'D)
What? You didn't know?

IM looks into the cyclopean, grinning face. IM laughs. Jack pulls the eye from the glass and holds it like a medal.

JACK (CONT'D)
It's nothing but a minor discipline.
And you know what discipline is,
Brother? Sacrifice. Sacrifice!

Jack smashes the glass off the table. IM releases Jack. IM laughs loudly. He looks at Jack's one-eyed face. IM turns his back on Jack. He exits the silent room. The Brothers freeze in horror.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

IM marches down the sidewalk. He carries his briefcase.

IM sees a MAN in a camouflage Engineer's hat dip his brim and turn away. The man turns down an alley. He sees ANOTHER MAN across the street following his strides. IM stops. The MAN stops. IM continues walking. He peeks in the reflection of a store window.

A FIGURE approaches from behind. IM takes a running stride. He is tackled.

MAN
I've got him!

The Man in the Engineer's hat runs over.

ENGINEER
This is him.

IM struggles.

IM
Who am I?

ENGINEER
You represent the Brotherhood.

IM
I used to.

ENGINEER
The white man. The enemy.

One Man holds IM down to the cement. Engineer stands over him.

IM
We rose to action when you failed!
Tell Ras the Exhorter he is a
backwards son of a bitch.

Engineer hits IM in the stomach.

ENGINEER
The Exhorter? You mean the Destroyer.

IM
Is that what he calls himself now?

A nearby DOORMAN intervenes.

DOORMAN
Hey!

He pulls the Men from IM.

ENGINEER

Consider yourself warned. Ras won't be so kind.

IM

He can do whatever he likes. People know me. I have witnesses!

The Doorman shoves IM away.

IM (CONT'D)

People know who I am.

IM pauses in contemplation.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - DAY

IM carefully puts on a pair of dark sunglasses and a wide, gray hat.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

IM moves quickly down the street, his brim shading his face.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

IM enters his apartment complex. He unlocks his door.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - DAY

IM opens the door and flicks on a light switch. Nothing happens.

The apartment is trashed - upturned furniture, scattered papers, holes in the drywall, smashed glass. Dust lingers.

IM sets his briefcase on the floor. He hangs his gray hat on the brass hook by the door. He removes his sunglasses. He traverses the rubble and stands at his desk. The desk lamp flickers.

He picks up a few loose pages. He tosses them aside. He looks at the buzzing desk lamp. He tears it from the desk and smashes it against the wall. There is a burst of light, then darkness.

INT. MEETING HALL - DAY

IM walks into a dark, empty meeting hall. It is silent. He walks past the large table and into the back room.

IM

Jack? It's me.

IM flicks on a light in the back room. There is a map of the city. Pins indicate different districts. IM flips through a stack of papers on the desk. They are sheets of members' names, organized by district.

EXT. CHTHONIAN - DAY

IM enters the building.

INT. CHTHONIAN LOUNGE - DAY

IM opens the large, elaborate doors. The room is empty.

IM

Jack. I have some news for you.

Drinks are scattered about, half-empty. IM dips his finger into a glass of wine and tastes. He exits.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

IM waits to cross a street. He is wearing his sunglasses and hat.

A scantily dressed WOMAN turns toward him in recognition.

WOMAN

Rinehart, is that you, baby?

IM turns to face her.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing down here?

IM looks at her colorful, tight-fitting clothes.

IM

I had some business.

WOMAN

Wait a minute. You ain't Rinehart.

IM
I apologize, Miss.

WOMAN
What are you trying to do?

IM
I suppose we are both mistaken.

WOMAN
You better not let Rine catch you
pretending to be him.

IM
He must be a lucky man. You were
quite pleased to see him.

The Woman smiles.

WOMAN
Now, you're about to get me in
trouble.

She struts briskly across the street.

EXT. HARLEM STREET - NIGHT

IM ambles through Harlem in disguise. He watches the people
on the street. He listens to their conversations.

IM stops in front of a bar called "THE DARK ROOM." He ducks
inside.

INT. THE DARK ROOM BAR - NIGHT

The room is eery. IM walks to the bar and sits on a stool.

Two YOUNG MEN in colorful clothing complete a fancy handshake
and swagger toward the door. They stop at IM.

YOUNG MAN 1
Yo, daddy-o.

IM
Good evening, boys.

YOUNG MAN 2
What you putting down, poppa?

The BARTENDER looks over his shoulder.

YOUNG MAN 2 (CONT'D)
I see. Playing it cool. Playing it cool.

The Young Men back out of the bar.

BARTENDER
What are you drinking, poppa-stopper?

IM
Whatever's coldest.

BARTENDER
You got it.

IM peeks around the room.

Brother Tobitt walks in and sits next to IM at the bar. IM stiffens. He adjusts his shades.

TOBITT
(to Bartender)
Hey, Barrel. I need a double gin.

Tobitt has the jitters.

BARREL
What's occurring, Brother?

IM listens.

TOBITT
I don't know. Ras is up on the North end making a raucous.

BARREL
Headed this way?

Tobitt does a double-take of IM.

Barrel slides a glass of gin to Tobitt. Tobitt downs it quickly.

IM stands and flicks money on the bar. Barrel quickly shoves it back.

BARREL (CONT'D)
You know I don't take your money here.

IM studies Barrel's stoicism. He slowly slides the bills into his pocket and leaves.

EXT. HARLEM STREET - NIGHT

IM strides with a commanding swagger down the sidewalk. A BUSKER sings a raspy Peetie Wheatstraw tune. A small MAN IN A SUIT catches up to IM.

SMALLS

Well if it ain't Rine the runner.
How's your hammer hanging, my man?

IM

Heavy.

SMALLS

No worries. It'll be lighter by
morning. Say, Mr. Rinehart, you
need a new man? I got fast shoes
and an ear for the blues.

IM

Not today.

IM moves across the street.

EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE CITY STREET - NIGHT

IM turns a corner and pauses. People flood the sidewalk and enter a small, white church.

A LITTLE GIRL hands IM a paper program. IM freezes. The Program reads, "BEHOLD THE INVISIBLE, AND YOU SHALL SEE THE UNKNOWN WONDERS - REV. B. P. RINEHART, SPIRITUAL TECHNOLOGIST."

VOICE (O.S.)

Behold the Invisible!

IM looks up. A YOUNG BOY stands on a box and shouts.

YOUNG BOY

Ye who are weary. Join us in the
new revelation of the old time
religion! Don't wait!

IM follows the crowd into the church.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

A choir sings from inside the chapel. An old CLERGYMAN greets IM.

CLERGYMAN

Evening, Reverend.

IM touches his hat. A group of WOMEN turn around smiling.

WOMAN

This here is Sister Harris, Reverend.
She's come to sing tonight.

IM

God bless you, Sister.

IM takes her hand. HARRIS is a young girl.

WOMAN

(to Harris)

Now, go on in and find a seat.

They all depart except for the Woman.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I have to tell you, Reverend. I
sold ten of your sermons last night.
Just wonderful.

IM hugs her.

IM

Bless you. Bless you.

Through the doors, the congregation rises. IM sees the
engraving above the altar. It reads, "LET THERE BE LIGHT."

IM (CONT'D)

I'll see you inside, Sister.

She enters the chapel. IM turns and exits.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

IM strides quickly down the sidewalk. The streets are
strangely empty and quiet.

INT. IM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

IM enters his trashed apartment. Dark. He walks to the
bathroom. Silence.

BATHROOM

He flicks on the light. It barely lights and flickers
violently. IM stares at himself in the mirror. He removes
his hat. He removes his glasses. He replaces his glasses.

A figure stirs behind him in the mirror. IM freezes. He removes his glasses slowly.

Sibyl wraps her arms around his body and kisses his neck. Mascara streams down her face. Bruises dress her arms.

SIBYL
(whispering)
When is it going to stop?

IM puts his glasses back on. He grabs her violently and pulls her from the bathroom.

LIVING AREA

IM carries Sibyl over the rubble and into the bedroom.

BEDROOM

IM throws Sibyl across the bed. He stretches her arms out wide in cruciform and holds them against the mattress. She cries.

SIBYL
Do it.

IM's shaded face is stoic. He thrusts. The crooked Renoir falls from the wall and lands atop the scattered dresser drawers and clothes.

A marble vase of wilted flowers shifts off the dresser and shatters on the floor. Grunting and painful sighs.

IM grabs Sibyl's lipstick from the nightstand. He twists it out and holds it in his mouth. He traces Sibyl's lips messily. He moves his mouth down to her stomach and writes, "RAPED BY SANTA" in bold, ruby letters.

IM continues thrusting in the reflection of the large vanity mirror. It vibrates. The mirror falls and shatters.

FADE TO:

EXT. HARLEM STREET - NIGHT

A fire hose explodes with water.

IM stands under a tree along the sidewalk. He holds his briefcase and wears his Rinehart hat and sunglasses. He watches the COPS spray unruly LOOTERS with the fire hose.

Looters run, shout, and throw rocks and bottles. Cops are scattered about grabbing Looters one by one.

ALLEY

IM turns and walks down a quieter back alley. A few KIDS run by with bottles, buckets, and rags.

IM walks toward a larger, brighter street. The pulsing noise of the CROWD grows louder.

Ras' accented voice pierces through in bursts.

ALLEY CORNER

IM halts at the corner. Noise is louder than ever.

STREET

A huge Crowd is gathered in a small, city square park. They encircle Ras on ladder. They cheer and shout. Ras wears animal skin and holds a spear.

RAS

The time for action is here!

MEN ON HORSES surround Ras. Ras raises his spear. Other weapons rise from the crowd - knives, sticks, guns, etc.

ALLEY CORNER

People shout and scatter. A few run past IM in the alley and smash storefront windows.

A large white drop lands on IM's brim and drips onto his jacket. IM removes his hat.

Gunshot. A bullet catches IM's cheek.

ALLEY

IM drops the hat, turns, and runs through the alley.

STREET

He peels left out of the alley across shattered glass. YOUNG MEN hurl flaming bottles into the store. An explosion fires off behind IM.

SIDE STREET

IM ducks into a side street and sits against the brick. He removes his glasses and tosses them into his briefcase.

Blood streams down his face. He touches his jaw. Sweat pour from his forehead.

Gunshots.

A MAN WIELDING A KNIFE dives forward in front of IM and lands dead on his face. He slides to a stop in the gravel.

IM recoils. MEN WITH GUNS hurry past.

IM's vision blurs. Blood puddles beneath the fallen Man. IM looks ahead in the street.

THREE GUYS push a large, steel safe down the middle of the road.

SAFE MAN

Out of the way!

Bullets strike tires of parked cars. Air hisses. Explosion. TWO MEN duck down beside IM.

MAN 1 looks at IM.

MAN 1

You alright.

IM

I think so.

Man 1 pulls IM to his feet.

MAN 1

Come on, brother. Got to keep moving. They're really shooting now.

MAN 2

This yours?

Man 2 holds IM's briefcase. IM takes it. They jog down the side street.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)

Hey, Du. We doing it or what?

DU
 Hell yeah. Soon as I get these
 shirts.

APARTMENT COMPLEX

They all stop in the rear of a beat-up complex. Du jumps up the fire escape and ducks in an apartment.

MAN 2
 Still bleeding?

IM turns and touches his face.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)
 No, you'll be fine. Here.

Man 2 hands IM a flask. IM drinks.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)
 Got me a whole case stashed. We got
 one hell of a storm coming.

A WOMAN HOLDING A BROOMSTICK walks past nonchalantly. Dead chickens dangle from their necks at the end of the stick.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)
 Damn, man. They're picking it clean.

Du jumps out of the apartment and tosses boxes down to IM and Man 2. The boxes are full of hats and rags. Du tosses a sack to Man 2.

DU
 Fill 'em up, Sco.

SCO stuffs the contents of the boxes into his sack. Du jumps down. Sco looks at IM's briefcase.

SCO
 Looks like you got some loot too.
 Fill her up.

Du fills his sack.

DU
 (to Sco)
 Hurry up, man. Got to keep moving.
 These is dog days.

SCO
 To the store.

STREET

The three of them run around the corner. THREE MORE GUYS stand with buckets.

BUCKET 1
What took so long?

BUCKET 2 hurls a brick through the store window. They all climb in.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

The Men shuffle through the dark aisles.

SCO
Flashlight. Flashlight.

Sco tosses flashlights and headlamps to everyone. IM catches a headlamp.

IM
What are these for?

DU
You'll see.

Bullets fly into the store. The Men duck.

SCO
Stay organized!

The Men flick on their lights.

DU
Keep your lights on the floor!

BUCKET 1
Got the fuel.

SCO
Good.

DU
Put it in these buckets.

The Men squeeze fluid into the buckets.

SCO
Let's go!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

All the Men run out of the store and into the street. IM follows. Sounds of gunshots and shattered glass.

Their lights separate and skip through the Crowd like tiny searchlights. IM keeps an eye on Sco as they move through the shouting Crowd.

TENEMENT BUILDING

The Men gather in front of a run-down tenement building.

DU
Here we are.

Du looks up at the building.

IM
You live here?

The Men enter with the buckets of fuel.

DU
This ain't living, man.

Du runs in. IM follows.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

They bolt up the staircase one by one.

DU
Start at the top. All the way!

SECOND FLOOR

Men enter the rooms and begin splashing fuel. An OLD WOMAN grabs Du's arm and pleads.

OLD WOMAN
Where am I supposed to go?

DU
Don't start now, Lottie. It's too late.

Lottie storms off weeping.

BEDROOM

IM sloshes fuel on a mattress.

SCO

Alright, boys. Everybody out!

STAIRWELL

The Men run into the stairwell.

SCO

It's all you, Du.

Sco hands Du a damp rag. Du lights the rag on fire with a match and hurls it in a bedroom. IM watches from behind Du. They move quickly down the stairwell. IM grabs his briefcase at the bottom of the stairs.

EXT. TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The Men run out into the street.

People in the street are running faster and screaming louder than ever. Smoke billows in the distance. IM freezes on the sidewalk.

A GROUP OF PEOPLE tip over a milk truck. A WOMAN hurls milk bottles at passersby. One GUY holds exploding champagne bottles while ANOTHER fires off flares. Rocks and bottles fly. PEOPLE fall and get trampled. Gunshots.

IM sees a LITTLE BOY alone by the trolley tracks. He holds a large, steel ladle and straddles the third rail. IM watches. The ladle touches.

The tenement building explodes in flames behind IM. The light washes out the Boy. IM turns around. He stares at the flames. They reflect in his eyes.

VOICE (O.S.)

Ain't it wonderful, Brother?

IM looks for the speaker. No one. IM moves quickly away.

STREET

He plunges swiftly into the river-like crowd and drifts swiftly along.

An arm grabs IM.

SCO

Hey man. Where are you going?

IM

It was run or get run over. Watch out!

IM shoves Sco to keep him from running into a BLEEDING MAN who falls against a light post.

BLEEDING MAN

Doctor.

IM takes the shirt from the Man's hands, wraps it around the bleeding arm and tightens. Blood gushes onto IM hands. He wipes his hands on his briefcase. Sco looks at IM under the street light.

SCO

Say, you look familiar.

IM

Yeah?

SCO

Shit.

IM and Sco look ahead to see a GROUP OF POLICEMEN charging in their direction. They hold shields above their white helmets. Bricks are thrown from the rooftops.

DU

Get down!

Du and the Men tackle Sco and IM. Bricks fly overhead. They roll against the building.

Cops fall and help one another.

Du pulls a revolver from his boot.

DU (CONT'D)

Time to fight back.

Du shoots.

SCO

Come on, Du. Let's get out of here.

DU

Hell, I'm staying. If there's gonna be a race riot, I'm fighting back.

Du empties his gun.

Shotgun. Du falls to the cement with a hole in his chest. IM stands and runs. His briefcase swings against his legs.

A POLICE DOG catches sight of IM. It runs toward him. IM runs faster. The Dog jumps. IM hits it with a swinging briefcase. It yelps away. IM turns a corner.

NARROW STREET

It is quieter. Lights in the buildings shut off one by one. Heavy breathing. IM turns another corner.

WIDE STREET

MOUNTED POLICEMEN charge into the crowd beating everyone in sight.

A LADY runs up to a horse and hits it with a frying pan, screaming.

Noise rushes back in. Gunshots. Shattered glass. Looters throw things and run.

IM jumps in and runs with the crowd.

The street is flooded. The water deepens. IM's ankles are submerged. IM jumps up on the sidewalk, still running. Looking in all directions. He slides to a stop beneath hanging cadavers. He shrieks.

For a moment, one resembles Sibyl. Red writing on the stomach twists out of view. IM looks back up. They are dummies.

IM scurries into shrubbery for cover. He sees Ras on a horse walking in his direction.

Gunshots.

RAS

Come! Join us! Burst in the armory
with guns and ammunition!

Ras moves nearer. IM frantically opens his briefcase and pulls out his glasses. The shattered lenses crumble to the cement.

IM stands to run in the opposite direction. Mounted Police enclose him.

VOICE (O.S.)

Look, Ras! The Brother!

IM spins around. Dummies still hang overhead. Ras sees IM.

RAS

Betrayer!

IM watches Ras launch a spear in his direction. IM falls to the cement. The spear strikes a hanging dummy.

IM
I'm no longer a Brother.

Ras stops in front of IM.

IM (CONT'D)
They want this to happen.

RAS
No more traitors. No more Uncle
Tom's! Grab him!

IM jumps and pulls the spear from the dummy. Police close in from the other side. IM threatens with the spear. Ras' men stop.

IM
You're executing their plan! They
want the streets to flow with blood.
Your blood. My blood.

Ras' men hold up their guns. IM points the spear downward in forfeit. Dummies overhead. IM looks into the barrels of the guns.

Lights whiz by. Police close in. Men run by. Rubble burns in the distance.

The flooded street is a shallow river of flowing water. Garbage and miscellaneous items float by. Bodies are scattered about.

IM (CONT'D)
Don't do it for them.

Ras looks into IM's eyes.

RAS
Hang him!

IM hurls the spear. The spear rips through Ras' mouth, in one cheek and out the other. Ras gags and struggles.

IM slips Clifton's chain link over his knuckles. He hits one of Ras' men. The Police shoot. Another of Ras' men falls. IM jumps over the hedges and runs into a narrow alley.

CROWDED STREET

IM runs out into another street. He looks back. He takes an anonymous punch to the face. He falls hard into the shallow water. The chain link flies into the night.

CANAL STREET

IM regains consciousness. A violent curtain of water sprays into the sky nearby. Water nearly submerges his body. His mouth bleeds.

He stands, vision blurry. He walks down the street. Water rises to his knees. The street is a canal. He pushes forward. The water rushes against him violently. It rises to his waist.

An iron fence lines the houses he passes. Only the iron tips penetrate the surface of the water.

IM shouts in pain. He walks hard against the current. Street lights explode into darkness. Bodies float past.

The water weakens and grows shallower.

IM stops and turns around. Flames burst from buildings in the distance.

Gunshots echo.

Water sprays toward the sky. People scream. Noise fades into silence.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hey.

IM turns around slowly. A GROUP OF MEN hold baseball bats. The LEADER speaks softly. All else is silent.

LEADER

What's in the briefcase?

IM lifts the briefcase. It drips with water.

He runs. The MEN chase him. IM sees an open manhole. He jumps in.

INT. UNDERGROUND - NIGHT

IM lands in complete darkness.

Burst of dust and coughing. Laughter echoes.

VOICE (O.S.)

Did you see that? Boom! Down he went!

VOICE 2 (O.S.)

Nigger in a coal pile.

Laughter.

LEADER (O.S.)
Come on out, black boy.

IM shuffles around. Only a pinhole of light seeps through from above.

IM
Come on down.

LEADER (O.S.)
What's in the briefcase?

IM
You.

LEADER (O.S.)
Me?

IM
All of you. What do you think of that?

VOICE 2 (O.S.)
Can't you see? Light a match.

Flicker of light overhead. IM stirs up dust.

LEADER
Goddamn black son of a bitch. See how you like this.

Something small lands near IM. He covers it with his hands.

The Men put on the manhole cover. Debris showers down. Complete darkness and silence.

IM breathes.

Grunt.

Long silence.

He feels around.

The handle knocks against his briefcase.

Clicking of the locks.

Striking of a match.

IM holds a match in front of his face. Only the whites of his eyes are visible.

He peers into his briefcase.

He pulls out a piece of paper. It reads, "HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA."

Match extinguishes.

Striking of a match.

He looks at his diploma. He lights it on fire.

He crawls into blackness. Breathing.

The paper burns up.

Match strike.

IM removes a letter from the briefcase. It is Bledsoe's letter to Emerson. He lights it.

He moves into blackness.

He exhales acutely as he steps off a platform into a different room. The echoes resound more deeply. Low frequency hum.

The paper burns out.

Match strike.

He reaches into the briefcase and removes Clifton's doll. He lights it.

He continues to move more quickly. A new room.

Coughing.

A pinhole of light peeks through the ceiling.

The ceiling rips slowly like a canvas. Slightly larger hole.

IM falls onto his stomach. The ground is sand.

The ceiling rips more. Blue sky appears. IM crawls toward the sky.

He emerges on a sandy river bank. He is covered in coal dust. He coughs.

The wind blows gently. A large river flows calmly. Open land.

A giant, steel bridge stretches over the river and disappears into the horizon.

IM struggles to crawl from the hole.

Jack, Norton, Bledsoe, Emerson, and Others stand around him. IM shields his eyes. He collects himself.

IM

No. I'm through with your illusions.
I'm done.

Jack steps forward.

JACK

Not quite. But it won't be long.
Unless, of course, you'd like to
return?

They study IM for a response. Bledsoe chuckles.

JACK (CONT'D)

No? If you refuse, we'll be forced
to remove more than just your
illusions.

IM tries to rise but cannot. Jack and the Others grab IM,
pull him from the sand, and hold him upright.

The sun blinds him. Jack pulls out a knife. He pauses then
stabs IM violently in both eyes.

IM screams. His vision melts into red.

Black.

Jack throws IM's eyes into the river.

IM falls to his knees. He screams.

JACK (CONT'D)

You're free! How does it feel?

IM collects himself. He points his face toward the sun.
Blood streams from his eye sockets.

IM stands. His grunts turn into laughing.

IM

Look.

He laughs.

IM (CONT'D)

Look!

JACK

What are you doing? Why are you
laughing?

IM

If you look, you'll see.

Jack turns around.

IM (CONT'D)
It's not invisible.

IM smiles.

JACK
See what?

IM
Wasting along the water.

Jack moves in and stares at IM's bloody face. He grabs IM's collar in anger.

IM (CONT'D)
Your sun. And your moon!

BLED SOE
He's crazy.

WRESTRUM
A mystic idealist.

IM
You hear that drip-drop? Listen...

Quiet breeze.

IM (CONT'D)
That's your world. Your universe.
Your history. Listen to that sound!
Now let's hear you laugh!

JACK
No.

Everyone moves in and grabs IM, lifting him into the air.
IM laughs.

JACK (CONT'D)
Stop him!

Black.

INT. UNDERGROUND - BLACK

Click. A flashlight pops on. White teeth hold the steel barrel.

The light illuminates a bunch of multi-colored cables. HANDS separate the cables. The Hands pull out a green cable wrapped shabbily with electrical tape. They unwrap. The green wire is corroded and dirty.

The Hands clip the wire with pliers, and strip the two ends until copper shines through. The Hands twist the ends together.

Extreme, bright light flickers for a moment. IM is wearing all black.

The Hands wrap the wire with electrical tape. The lights flick on with the hum of a generator.

Thousands of light bulbs, different sizes and hues, cover the ceiling and walls.

IM is bearded, wears a dark sweater and dark pants, and holds a flashlight in his mouth. He removes the flashlight and clicks it off. Paper, sketches, books, and trash line the walls and floor. Nearly everything is white and buzzing.

IM moves to his makeshift, steel desk and sits in front of his typewriter. He pushes the cylinder to the center.

He thinks.

He clicks a few keys.

He sits back in his chair.

He rips the paper from the typewriter and places it atop a tall stack.

The rumble of a subway grows louder and shakes his room.

CUT TO GRAY

THE END